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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

SPACE IN TONI MORRISON'S WORKS

BY

LORRAINE SOMERS

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

Edmonton, Alberta

Fall 1992

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Lorraine Somers

219 Hillington Court

Edmonton, Alberta

T5R 5X5

June 30, 1992

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned cerify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled Space in Toni Morrison's Works submitted by Lorraine Somers in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of M.A.

R. H. Solomon

G. Stephenson

B. Bain

May 5, 1992

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to:

Bea, who understood that woman cannot live by bread alone and, consequently, kept the larder full.

Karen, who, one summer, lay on my couch, stood in my kitchen, sat on my patio and talked of many things.

Jayne and Leah, without whom my "space" would be a void.

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the importance of "oppressive," "invaded," and "soul" space in Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye and Beloved, spaces which illuminate and clarify both narratives. Whether Morrison examines the perverse effects of slavery or of idealized female beauty, her characters are physically inscribed in ways that metaphorically mark them as the racial and sexual "Other" who exists on the margins of society. Scarring and deformities form a subtext that is inscribed with literal and figurative messages from the past that speak of the present problems and future dangers Morrison's characters will encounter. These physical "markings" parallel the delineations of borders around spaces; in the worst spaces are written fates filled with rage, destructiveness, madness, and death.

The focus of this thesis centers on indoor space, that is, interiors that convey the relationship between the private spaces Afro-Americans inhabit and their behavior within them. The behavioral patterns and the considerations of space are complex in both novels, each of which begins by fixing images of the houses the main characters reside in, houses that are full of suffering and appalling secrets, where characters seem in danger of succumbing to surrounding exigencies. The success or failure of these characters to attain soul space overtly signals their condition and position in past and present society. The very features that alienate Morrison's characters from society deepen their need for soul space and increase the reader's sensitivity to these psychological, religious, and cultural "room[s] of one's own."

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Introduction

In The Poetics of Space, Gaston Bachelard seeks to determine "the human value of the sorts of space that may be grasped, that may be defended against adverse forces" (xxxi). Bachelard names this space "felicitous" or "eulogized" space and reasons that

> [s]pace that has been seized upon by the imagination cannot remain indifferent space subject to the measures and estimates of the surveyor. It has been lived in, not in its positivity, but with all the partiality of the imagination. Particularly, it nearly always exercises an attraction. For it concentrates being within limits that protect (xxxii).

For Bachelard, this concentration of being occurs in the felicitous space of houses, nests, shells, drawers, chests, wardrobes, nooks, and corners (xiv). As a phenomenological critic, Bachelard considers the "onset of the [poetic] image in the individual consciousness," that is, "when it emerges into consciousness as a direct product of the heart, soul, and being of man apprehended in actuality" within spaces having protective and imagined value (xv, xiv). Whether he examines intimate space, miniature and immense space, the dialectics of outside and inside space, or the roundness of being, the images that concern Bachelard are those that attract the imagination.

Although Bachelard limits his study to an examination of felicitous space, he acknowledges the existence of "hostile space...the space of hatred and combat [which he believes] can only be studied in the context of impassioned subject matter and apocalyptic images" (xxxii). The significance of this statement is striking in light of Sandra Gilbert's and Susan Gubar's explication of the female imagination in Madwoman in

the Attic. Common to the works of the nineteenth-century women writers that Gilbert and Gubar consider are "images of enclosure and escape, fantasies in which maddened doubles functioned as asocial surrogates for docile selves, metaphors of physical discomfort manifested in frozen landscapes and fiery interiors...along with obsessive depictions of diseases like anorexia, agoraphobia, and claustrophobia" (xi). Citing Bachelard's work, Gilbert and Gubar point out "the extraordinary discrepancy between the almost consistently 'felicitous space' [Bachelard] discusses and the negative space" that they find exists in women's writing (87-88). Gilbert and Gubar account for Bachelard's interpretation by suggesting that he associates "protective asylum... with...maternal instincts" and conclude that the "symbolism of space must inevitably have very different implications for male critics and for female authors" (88). While Gilbert's and Gubar's observations are judicious, their inquiry necessarily examines only white, middle-class women writers; with few exceptions, women from ethnics minorities or women burdened by poverty and lack of education did not publish in the nineteenth-century. However, with more minority women writers receiving critical recognition today, Gilbert's and Gubar's study raises the question: What implications does space carry for the Afro-American woman writer?

When the characters in Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye and Beloved stand together as one group, it is apparent that the motion and spirit that impels them is their search for space "in a world out there that [they can] live in" (BEL 183). The more Morrison's characters are restricted by space, the more that space becomes "the space of hatred and combat," to use Bachelard's terms. Moreover, the more impassioned Morrison's subject matter is -- slavery and Reconstruction in Beloved,

for example -- the more aberrant and grotesque her imagery. This aspect of Morrison's writing aligns her with the literary mode that Ellen Moers names "Female Gothic," a genre in which "the spatial imagery of enclosure and escape, elaborated with what frequently becomes obsessive intensity, characterizes much of...the literature of nineteenth-century women and their twentieth-century descendants," as Gilbert and Guber say (83). Concern with spatial constrictions permeates the works that Moers examines, as well as those analysed by Gilbert and Guber who summarize this insertion of themes of restriction into female writing:

> From Ann Radcliffe's melodramatic dungeons to Jane Austen's mirrored parlors, from Charlotte Brontë's haunted garrets to Emily Brontë's coffin-shaped beds,...from Emily Dickinson's haunted chambers to H.D.'s tightly shut sea-shells and Sylvia Plath's grave-caves, imagery of entrapment expresses the woman writer's sense that she has been dispossessed precisely because she is so thoroughly possessed....(83-84)

Inextricably bound with this sense of possession/dispossession is the concept of the "self-hating self," as Moers defines it, trapped in the architecture of the body (109). This is a concept common to the freakish, haunted nature of writers like Djuna Barnes and Carson McCullers, who recognize what Simone de Beauvoir explains as women's "conflict between her autonomous existence and her objective self, her 'being-the-other'" (22). Frederick J. Hoffman's observation that "in a society where intensities of behavior are frequent, the 'gothic' is a kind of norm" could well be used to describe what is natural to women's literature, especially in the twentieth century, and even more predictably in the doubly marginalized world of black women writers (118). Literary kin to the characters in Sherwood Anderson's Winesburg,

Ohio, a proliferation of grotesques who challenge definitions of "normal" women surfaces in women's literature in the first half of the century as writers question what is truly male, truly female, truly human.

Morrison's works display the female literary convention which exposes the grotesque elements women face in the world, grotesqueries that increase as we move from white to black lives. But in both worlds, these writers present the conventional life of city or country settings as ominous and absurd for the women in it. The freakish qualities and haunted dispositions of characters in Morrison's works point to the nature of the space that many Afro-Americans inhabit. As Keith E. Byerman argues, Morrison uses the bizarre "to examine the even greater grotesqueries of American society...[as well as] to show the particular appropriateness of the grotesque in black literature that is also social criticism" (447). Whether Morrison examines the perverse effects of slavery or of idealized female beauty (the blonde, blue-eyed, white icon), her characters are inscribed in ways that metaphorically mark them as the racial and sexual "other" who exists on the margins of society. Characters who find themselves in oppressive and invaded space search for "soul" space, a term Elizabeth Schultz uses to mean space in which characters "discover the joys of being [them]selves...free Afro-American[s]...free soul[s]" (265). Oppressive space is that which weighs heavily on the mind and spirit, while invaded space is dangerous -- threatening destruction of the mind, body, and spirit. In the following examination of these three kinds of spaces, Bachelard's work on felicitous space is useful as an analytical tool for contemplating its opposites (oppressive and invaded space) and its analagous space (soul space).

While the search for space continues in the lives of Morrison's

characters, physical deformities, inborn as well as those acquired in life, destroy meaningful existence unless these characters also identify and maintain soul space. In Morrison's works, such scars and deformities form a subtext that is inscribed with literal and figurative messages from the past that speak of the present problems and future dangers her characters will encounter. Physical scarring parallels the delineations of borders around spaces; in the worst spaces are written fates filled with rage, destructiveness, madness, and death. In The Bluest Eye, Pecola, described as a "cross between a puppy and a dying man," is "the hideous progeny," to use Mary Shelley's words, of a self-hating mother whose gimpy foot flops when she walks and an alcholic father whose incestuous lust pushes his daughter over the border to insanity (100). In Beloved, the most impassioned of Morrison's work, a complex of images comes together to illustrate the macabre nature of slavery. Sethe has a "tree on her back" carved by her master's whip, whereas Paul D wears a "tree," a three-prong iron collar, on his neck. Sethe's mother has a tattoo burnt on her rib and a smile permanently etched on her face from frequently having a slave's bit in her mouth. Her friend Nan has half an arm. Baby Suggs limps. Beloved bears the circumstances of her bizarre death in her name, in the fingernail prints on her forehead, in her lineless palms, and in the scar around her neck.

This thesis examines the importance of these kinds of spaces in The Bluest Eye and Beloved, which won Morrison a Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1988. Questions of space and identity are interwoven throughout these works; "space" also illuminates and clarifies the main narrative line in Sula, Song of Solomon, Tar Baby, and Jazz. Mai-Nsangli Jua has investigated symbolic space as it relates to geographical terrain and the "self" in a 1984 dissertation; however, this thesis concentrates on

indoor space, that is, houses and their rooms, interiors that convey the relationship between the private spaces Afro-Americans inhabit and their behavior within them. The behavioral patterns and the considerations of space are complex. Both The Bluest Eye and Beloved begin by fixing images of the houses the main characters inhabit, houses that are full of suffering and appalling secrets, where characters seem in danger of succumbing to surrounding exigencies.

The first chapter, then, deals with "oppressive space," the second with "invaded space," the third with "soul space." Each examines how characters maneuver back and forth, within, and around these spaces in efforts to identify the "self." The success or failure of these characters to attain soul space in a world hostile to them overtly signals their condition and position in past and present society. Chapter 3, "Soul Space," is by far the shortest of the three chapters, suggesting the sad paucity of such security in America as Morrison's characters experience it. As Morrison makes clear, the very features that alienate her characters from society deepen their need for soul space and increase the reader's sensitivity to these psychological, religious, and cultural "room[s] of one's own."

Chapter I

Oppressive Space

O God! I could be bounded in a nutshell, and count myself a king of infinite space, were it not that I have bad dreams.

Shakespeare, Hamlet II.ii.259

In both The Bluest Eye and Beloved, Toni Morrison uses physical space to signal the well-being of her characters. Rarely do black characters occupy felicitous space; rather, as Morrison says, they "move[] about...on the hem of life, struggling to consolidate [their] weaknesses and hang on, or to creep singly up into the major folds of the garment" (BE 18). This metaphor encapsulates Morrison's recognition that the kind of space one occupies determines the condition of one's life, forces response, and reveals character. Acknowledging that racist ideology depends upon the peripheral existence of the oppressed group, Morrison carefully works spatial imagery into her artistic representation of Afro-American life. The more oppressive the space, the more spiritually bereft are Morrison's characters, whose sanity is tied to suffering, a connection that resists political polarization. This notion is, on Morrison's part, courageous, for it belies the popular belief that oppression enhances spirituality.

Because The Bluest Eye deals with the dominant ideology of the Dick and Jane myth, an ideology in which black-skinned and brown-eyed people will always measure up as inadequate, Pecola Breedlove's quest for blue eyes is a quest for space within "the major folds of the garment." Only by acquiring blue eyes will Pecola enter space reserved for the white race. In order to illustrate the wake of psychological damage such

unattainable aspirations leave, Morrison begins The Bluest Eye with three versions of the same passage from a Dick and Jane primer which epitomizes the standardized ideal of the white American family. Morrison then manipulates this material to her own end.

The first version reads,

> Here is the house. It is green and white. It has a red door. It is very pretty. Here is the family. Mother, Father, Dick, and Jane live in the green-and-white house. They are very happy. See Jane. She has a red dress. She wants to play. Who will play with Jane? See the cat. It goes meow-meow. Come and play. Come and play with Jane. The kitten will not play. See Mother. Mother is very nice. Mother, will you play with Jane? Mother laughs. Laugh, Mother, laugh. See Father. He is big and strong. Father, will you play with Jane? Father is smiling. Smile, Father, smile. See the dog. Bowbow goes the dog. Do you want to play with Jane? See the dog run. Run, dog, run. Look, look. Here comes a friend. The friend will play with Jane. They will play a good game. Play, Jane, play. (1)

The adjectives "happy," "good," "big," "strong," "nice, and "pretty" particularize this family's positive qualities, and when coupled with some form of the verb "to be" and the adverb "very," the degree of "truth" regarding these qualities intensifies. Yet the tone of this diction, by its sheer insistence, serves to subtly undermine the positive qualities of the family as does the monotonic repetition of action verbs which are meant to evoke an image of the vibrant, nuclear family but which, instead, disclose their underlying vapidity. Michael Awkward sees in this passage, "an estrangement suggested by the family's inability to

respond to...Jane's desire for play [which] implies that theirs is solely a surface contentment" (59). Word choice and rhythm indirectly expose the patina of respectability that covers the less estimable qualities of the bourgeoisie, and when one also considers the ominous significance of the red door and Jane's red dress, the passage takes on portentous undertones. Faber Birren, who has written over twenty books on the psychology of color, associates the negative qualities of red with anxiety, disappointment, failure, rejection, and defeat. Mentioning Birren in her article, Bonnie Shipman Lange reasons that Morrison uses red "to increase tension and to create a feeling of foreboding in the reader"; Pecola, Shipman Lange notes, "wears...a red sweater and meets with repeated misfortune, including being raped by her father" (176, 177). Shipman Lange, however, makes no mention of the analogous relationship Morrison draws between Pecola and Jane when she dresses them both in red, a similarity that undercuts Jane's apparent safety and security within the family unit and may alert the reader to the fact that incest crosses all socio-economic, race, and class barriers. While it appears that this family is both physically beautiful and psychically healthy, a state characterized by their sanguine existence in the pretty house, the subtext reveals an emotional flatness that become increasingly evident when Morrison repeats the passage a second and third time.

With the omission of all capitalization and punctuation in the second version, individual sentences become hard to delineate and tonal quality all but disappears:

> Here is the house it is green and white it has a red door it is a very pretty house here is the family mother father dick and jane live in the green-and-white house they are very happy... play jane play. (1)

As standard English gives way, so does the perception that the psychic state of the family remains intact. Enmeshed in the string of words that give no indication of where units of meaning begin or end, the personalities of Mother, Father, Dick, and Jane begin to blur.

In the third version, Morrison omits spaces between words, thereby, compressing the passage to the point where it loses meaning:

> Hereisthehouseitisgreenandwhiteithasareddooritisaveryprettyhouse
> hereisthefamilymotherfatherdickandjaneliveinthegreenandwhitehouse
> theyareveryhappy...playjaneplay. (2)

Without capitalization, punctuation, or spacing, the passage reveals that the original portrait of the family is easily dissolved. There is no longer "space" for any individual perception of self, and while the passage forebodes Pecola's fate, it also questions the pathology of the closed family unit in general.

Raymond Hedin, among others, discusses how Morrison uses the primer material thematically as both an epigraph and as chapter headings.[1] Hedin notes that

> Morrison arranges the novel so that each of its sections provides a bitter gloss on key phrases from the novel's preface, a condensed version of the Dick and Jane reader. These phrases...describe the [American] cultural ideal of the healthy, supportive, well-to-do family. The seven central elements of Jane's world -- house, family, cat, Mother, Father, dog, and friend -- become, in turn, plot elements, but only after they are inverted to fit the realities of Pecola's world. (50)

To make the inverse relationship of the plot elements clear, Morrison further manipulates the third version of the primer material when she

introduces the reader to the Breedlove family. The chapter heading reads,

> Hereisthehouseitisgreenandwh
> iteithasareddooritisveryprett
> yitisveryprettyprettyprettyp. (30)

Repetitive reference to the prettiness of the house underscores the precarious condition of the Breedlove's collective psyche since it illustrates their fixation upon the beauty they will never have. Life in an abandoned store, a building that "neither recede[s] into...nor harmonize[s] with [its surroundings but which]...foists itself on the eye of the passerby in a manner that is both irritating and melancholy," defines and confirms the Breedlove's entrenched belief in their debilitating ugliness (30).

As the novel progresses, the reader comes to understand that the three versions of the Dick and Jane primer may represent the wealthy, white Fisher family who live in a large house in the suburbs; the poor, black MacTeer family who live in a house whose windows are stuffed with rags; and the financially and emotionally destitute Breedlove family who live in the cramped quarters of an abandoned store. The novel begins with the words "Here is the house," and the correlation between bodies housed in geometric structures and souls housed in bodies becomes the central metaphor for the psychic state of her characters. Gaston Bachelard provides a way of understanding the symbolic significance of the Breedlove's dwelling place when he asserts that "a house, even more than landscape, is a 'psychic state'" (72). The correlation between the house and its inhabitants is, in Bachelard's view, a richly inscribed metaphor that, when carried over, reflects the souls of its occupants. More than any other image, Morrison uses the "being of [the] house" to

reflect the being of characters who inhabit it (Bachelard 47).

Like Bachelard who claims that houses and rooms should be "read [as] psychological diagrams [that] guide...[readers] in their analysis of intimacy," Morrison is well aware of the emotional and intellectual response the dwelling place elicits, and although their points of view regarding space differ, both The Poetics of Space and The Bluest Eye deal with the development of the mind of the artist (38). Whereas Bachelard focuses on the phenomenology of the imagination within felicitous space, Morrison's omniscient narrator, Claudia, "learns how to create [her] own li[fe];...how to make living itself an art," as Elizabeth B. House argues (28). Claudia gives form to the chaos of Pecola's life by telling her story and, thereby, experiences what House describes as "the equilibrium inherent in art" that brings balance to Claudia's own life, an equilibrium the Breedloves never achieve because they have "no creative way to contain chaos" (House 44, 28). Robert Sargent also sees Claudia as "an artist...attempting to order her [childhood] experience." Citing Claudia's passage in which she says that "'the pieces of Cholly's life could become coherent only in the head of a musician....Only a musician would sense, know, without knowing that he knew, that Cholly was free'", Sargent reasons that "[o]nly the artist [Claudia]...who seeks to order experience...is able to hold together the complex pieces that make up the 'truth'" (233). Morrison's psychological diagram of the Breedloves's house is indicative of the family's emotional detachment from each other, a detachment that declares itself in a complete lack of interest in the aesthetic appeal or creature comforts of the home. Devoid of the artist's ability to see creative possibilities in life, the Breedloves leave unpainted the beaverboard partitions that separate the living room from the bedroom unpainted; ornaments remain on the artifical Christmas

tree year round; the piano, a symbol of art, stands silent.

Thwarted creativity is, undoubtedly, the result of emotionally crippling childhood experiences for Cholly and of profound disappointment regarding romantic love for Pauline. The move north to Lorain, Ohio proves devastating to any positive emotional and intellectual responsiveness to experience that Cholly and Pauline may have because, in this industrialized city, the mainsprings of behavior are self-interest and the drive for power and status. The Breedloves recognize their lack of power within urban space when their new sofa arrives with its upholstery ripped, and the store refuses to take it back. Such callous exploitation leaves the Breedloves incapable of repairing the sofa or, for that matter, of showing imaginative skill in the arrangement and execution of their urban life. Hence with ironic logic, the Breedloves project all their powerlessness, worthlessness, and self-hatred onto the faulty sofa whose

> ...joylessness stank...[i]t withheld the refreshment in a sleep slept on it. It imposed a furtiveness on the loving done on it. Like a sore tooth that is not content to throb in isolation, making breathing difficult, vision limited, nerves unsettled -- so a hated piece of furniture produces a fretful malaise that asserts itself throughout the house and limits the delight of things not related to it. (32)

The joylessness, the restraint, the furtiveness, the malaise assigned to the sofa are qualities the Breedloves possess themselves. Like the sofa, they believe they were "delivered" flawed. Nothing can "repair" the color of their skin and eyes; consequently, ugliness, not necessity, motivates their move to the abandoned store, and ugliness keeps them there. Since they do not value their physical selves, they cannot value

their physical space, and to this extent, only an abandoned store, the symbol of the American Dream gone awry, suits the Breedloves because blacks were never meant to partake in the social ideal of egalitarianism and material prosperity.

Although the confines of the tiny, abandoned store impinge upon the psychic welfare of the Breedloves, the implications surrounding the shared space of the one bedroom weigh heaviest on eleven-year-old Pecola. She can no more escape the disturbing sounds of her parents' sexual activity and the distressing sight of their brutal fights than she can escape her ugly skin. Unable, because of "youth and sex," to run away like her brother Sammy, Pecola endures the bounds of this violent and sexually charged space until endurance becomes too painful (37). Then having no space to disappear into, she merely disappears, a psychological solution common to sexually-abused children, who mentally escape their bodies in order to avoid intolerable degradation. Beginning with her toes, Pecola manages, through great effort, to make all but her eyes invisible. Pecola cannot accomplish this maneuver because she is an unwilling voyeur in the sordid adult world of bedroom politics. Within this highly charged space, Pecola sees in her father's naked body, in her parents's passionless copulation, and in the viciousness of their frequent brawls a reflection of her "relentless[] and aggressive[]" ugliness, "ugliness that made her ignored or despised at school, by teachers and classmates alike" (34, 39). Like the omnipotent All-Seeing Eye that cannot avert its gaze from that which is abhorrent, Pecola's disembodied eyes cannot discriminate between the prurient and the pleasing. "[Her eyes] were everything. Everything was there, in them" (39). Yet the sexual connotations implicit in the image of the All-Seeing Eye are more disturbing because the phallus has, since Egyptian

times, been known as the "One-Eyed God" (Walker 294). The eye, as organ, can both see and penetrate.

Throughout her novel, Morrison plays upon the different meanings of the homnonyms "eye" and "I." Raped by her father, that is, penetrated by the ancient symbol of the One-Eyed God, Pecola begins a descent into madness that defines her as "the bluest I." By extension, the pun in the novel's title, a play upon both the color blue and melancholia and the concept of self (the "I") as determined by one's eye coloration, points to what Marie A. Umeh describes as "black people feeling depressed and dejected about the many injustices inflicted upon them by both white and black Americans" (37). Umeh calls the novel "a blues moan" because it speaks about blacks rent by pain and "lament[ing]...the loss of love in a family which results in misery, madness, and death" (38). Umeh's statement recalls the 1929 blues ballad popularized by Ethel Waters "What Did I Do To Be So Black and Blue," a song that articulates black people's centuries-old blues moan.

Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi contributes a related comment, stating that "the superlative 'bluest' implies that other ethnic groups in America are blue and bluer but the black race is the bluest" (114-15). Ironically, Pecola seeks the bluest eyes because she believes that unsurpassed intensity of color will secure her position within the majority culture and assure her superiority over everyone else: those with blue or bluer eyes become comparatively inferior to her. The reality of the multiple iniquities suffered by Afro-Americans is defined metaphorically in the various meanings embedded in the novel's title, and its implications reach back to the beginnings of American slavery.

Given the entire history of Afro-Americans, it is not surprising that spatial imagery associated with peripheral existence threads its way

through Morrison's work, but this kind of imagery is certainly not exclusive to black literature. Ellen Moers and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, for instance, concern themselves with spatial imagery as it relates to the marginalization of the white woman writer, but in black literature, spatial imagery is fraught with an intensity unparalleled in mainstream women's writing.[2] Speaking about Morrison's work, Adam Miller points out how ex-slaves were "forced by violence and law" to live on the "minuscule portion [of space] alloted them" and, more often than not, this space was considered uninhabitable or worthless by those who decided and sanctioned such actions (48).[3] The Breedloves, like many Afro-Americans in the 1940's, are relegated to ghettoized urban space. Their attempt to escape the "anonymous misery of their storefront" is symbolic of their people's attempt to determine their own acts and states without external complusion (35). For Pecola's parents, attempted escape is less obsessively intense than their daughter's because, as adults, they are better able to cope with despair; nevertheless, the impossibility of escape leaves them with persistent and disturbing preoccupations. Pauline's excessive concern with idealized beauty becomes, in turn, self-righteous concern for respectability as indicated by her activity with a conventional church and by her pleasure in attaining the status of the "ideal" servant. Cholly's main distraction, on the other hand, is alcohol.

Grace Ann Hovet and Barbara Lounsberry see in Morrison's criticism of Pauline and Cholly Breedlove coping mechanisms "which are safe and derivative" (126). In Hovet's and Lounsberry's rendering of the family's misery, the Breedloves are "nesters who never dare to fly" (121). Using Hovet's and Lounsberry's remarks regarding the nesting syndrome as substantive evidence, it is clear that Morrison's position regarding

domestic security bears little resemblance to Bachelard's oneiric vision of "the happy household [as] a flourishing nest" wherein one "knows nothing of the hostility of the world" (97, 103). Characters in Morrison's work who dream a house as Bachelard does, as a nest that "sets us to daydreaming of security," are doomed because the source of their dream lies in aspiring to middle-class, white aspirations that, in fact, undermine the creative and imaginative life (102).

While Hovet's and Lounsberry's article is a cogent analysis of flight in Morrison's first three novels, it argues that the Breedloves's marriage "is jeopardized only when each falls victim to the 'nesting syndrome'...[that] Pauline is fine when she is ordering her own identity" in her parents' home, but they fail to take into account Pauline's early obsession with ordering and arranging that manifests itself in early childhood and is symptomatic of her neurotic state (124). Pauline's obession denotes an innate need to form a sequence or hierarchy with each item nestled in its appropriate space, and she is actually pleased when arrangements are disassembled because she can then reassemble them. This obsessive need develops into ordering the household, and by the time she is fifteen, Pauline revels in keeping her parents's "five-room frame house" in Kentucky (89). Only when Pauline begins to fantasize "about men and love and touching" is she prone to "extreme melancholy" (90). One wonders whether this early emphasis on orderliness followed by the desire "for redemption, salvation, a mysterious rebirth that would simply happen, with no effort on [Pauline's] part" is a synthesis of Freudian psychology and Morrison's philosophy regarding the importance of space (90). Unable to find felicitous space in society's hierarchical system where she can nestle comfortably, Pauline cannot successfully make the transition from childhood to adulthood because she is caught between the

freeing pleasures of the libido and the compelling need to construct an ordered existence while living on the borders of society. Though in the first stages of marriage Pauline equates orgasm with the colors of the rainbow, the pervasive loneliness of the two rooms above a furniture store accoutered with peeling, green kitchen chairs outweigh the libidinous pleasures of the flesh. The effects of oppressive space move Pauline to seek solitary pleasure in the "protective" space of the movie theatre where she becomes a willing voyeur habitually gratified by images of white America cast upon the screen. Within this space, Pauline "forg[ets] lust and simple caring for...[and begins to] regard love as possessive mating" (94, 97). This passage marks the beginning of Pauline's dissolution and is symbolized by the loss of her tooth, a loss that impells her to once again "put all the pieces together, make coherence where there had been none" (100). Yet by "assign[ing] herself a role in the scheme of things," that of the responsible, up-standing, church-going woman, Pauline forfeits pleasures of the flesh for glory in heaven, a strategy that makes perfect sense considering the similarity between religious practices and obsessive action (97). In effect, Pauline reverts to childhood pleasures where Freud's anal triad, orderliness, parsimony, and obstinacy, takes precedence.[4]

Morrison makes it clear that the movie theatre is the worst available space Pauline could choose in which to assuage her inner void because relinquishment of self to white ideals of beauty and romance are, in the words of her narrator, "the most destructive ideas in the history of human thought (97). As Jane Somerville argues,

> the inescapable imagery of the media...is immeasurably oppressive for Morrison's black women who cannot even aspire to the white ideals that surround them. Morrison deplores the

> disabling connection between surface beauty and the onerous concept of romantic love: if we are unlovely we will not be loved, and indeed, do not deserve to be. (18)

Since Pauline epitomizes the woman who believes that to be loved one must be lovely, it is fitting that, in the movie theatre while "five months pregnant and trying to look like Jean Harlow, she loses her tooth (98).

> But there must have been a speck, a brown speck easily mistaken for food but which did not leave, which sat on the enamel for months, and grew, until it cut into the surface and then to the brown putty underneath, finally eating away to the root, but avoiding the nerves, so its presence was not noticeable or uncomfortable. Then the weakened roots, having grown accustomed to the poison, responded one day to severe pressure, and the tooth fell free, leaving a ragged stump behind. But even before the little brown speck, there must have been the conditions, the setting that would allow it to exist in the first place. (92-93)

Clearly, the condition that precipitates Pauline's dissolution is her belief in idealized images of feminine beauty that serve to depersonalize women. Metaphorically, the loss of Pauline's tooth denotes her masochistic pleasure in submitting to such ideals; she succumbs to the pressure (the tyranny of ideal beauty) and becomes morally corrupt (rotten) by denying her blackness. Once Pauline's tooth falls out, she can no longer delude herself about being one of the beautiful. She can, however, serve the handsome and comely, and in serving them, Pauline moves into a different psychic space, one even more destructive to herself and her family. She becomes a narrow, priggish, outraged, and respectable domestic for the Fishers, whose name alludes to the dry waste

land of the soul. In both T.S. Eliot's poem "The Waste Land" and this text, the allusion expresses the need for salvation, but within the Fishers' household, liberation of the soul is impossible.

The Fishers' spacious house beside Lake Shore Park is the structural expression of its owner's discriminating taste and aesthetic sense, qualities that obscure their absence of soul as expressed in their condescension to those of lower rank. Mr. Fisher humors Pauline with patently untrue comments meant only as patronizing praise: he "would rather sell her blueberry cobbler than real estate" (101). Pauline relishes her newfound sense of power, accepts honey-tongued praise, and luxuriates in the opulence of the home, all the while becoming more and more indifferent to her own dwelling where "the things she could afford to buy did not last, had no beauty or style, and were absorbed by the dingy storefront" (101). Moreover, as Pauline "seeks flight away from black community and identity," as Hovet and Lounsberry assert, she effectively separates her worlds by never introducing the refinements of the Fishers's home into the storefront (126). In analyzing Pauline's reaction to community and identity, Hovet and Lounsberry establish that her move toward majority culture "constricts the possibilities of a full life [and leaves her] only marginally capable of expressing basic human emotions of grief, joy, and love" (129). Futhermore, by adopting conventional sexual mores and developing undue reverence for white property, she instills fear in her daughter, a fervent desire to run away in her son, and hatred in her husband. Reason, restraint, distance, and order take precedence over

> the dreadful funkiness[5] of passion, the funkiness of nature, the funkiness of the wide range of human emotion. Whenever it erupts, this Funk, [young black women from the

> South] wipe it away; where it crusts, they dissolve it; wherever it drips, flowers, or clings, they find it and fight it until it dies. They fight this battle all the way to the grave. The laugh that is a little too loud; the enunciation a little too round; the gesture a little too generous. They hold their behinds in for fear of a sway too free; when they wear lipstick, they never cover the entire mouth for fear of lips too thick, and they worry, worry, worry about the edges of their hair. (68)

The Fishers and "the world" alike articulate their approval of such behavior: "'We'll never let her go. We could never find anybody like Polly. She will not leave the kitchen until everything is in order. Really, she is the ideal servant'" (102, 101). Pauline, a stereotypical black mammy,[6] settles for managing the nest of others and effectively forgoes the possibility of finding "soul space".

Unlike Pauline's, Cholly's nesting instinct is fleeting, a compassionate and passionate reaction to meeting Pauline. Any emotional ties Cholly has with home and family are conclusively severed before he reaches adulthood. Cholly's mother abandons him in a tire rim within days of his birth, an act that designates him as junk and her as crazy. His Great Aunt Jimmy dies during his adolescence, leaving him without effective means or sustaining family ties. During his sexual initiation with Darlene, Cholly is interrupted by sniggering white hunters and forced at gunpoint to continue copulation. He is left with "a vacancy in his head...like the space left by a newly pulled tooth still conscious of the rottenness that had once filled it," recalling with the same image and import the irretrievable loss that Pauline experiences in the theatre upon losing her tooth (119). Subsequently, "with no more thought than a

chick leaving its shell," Cholly leaves home in search of the father he has never seen and is again rejected out of hand (120). Unable to suffer further, Cholly enters "[d]angerously free" space, psychic space that gives him the freedom to go where he pleases and to do what he pleases since "there was nothing more to lose" (125, 126). Having disposed of moral concepts like responsibility and justice, Cholly is not affected by imprisonment because his interest now lies solely in his own "perceptions and appetites" (126). Cholly's submission to dangerously free space suggests that the sexually-fraught demands of the id have overtaken the ego and superego; he no longer represses the satisfactions of the instinctual life and is free to rape his eleven-year-old daughter.

Yet when Cholly sees Pauline scratching her ankle with a flopping, archless foot, he responds out of sympathy for another crippled soul, her imperfection arousing in him an ardent desire "to nest with her" (126). But being emotionally deficient himself, he is unable to fill the void in her life, and marriage soon dulls his imagination, curiosity, and desire, while the birth of his children renders him "totally disfunctional" (126). Raised by his old Aunt Jimmy, Cholly has no experience with siblings and no interest in heirs; hence, Cholly reacts to his children according to the moment and escapes the oppressive responsibility of marriage by indulging in his only remaining interest: drink.

While Morrison tempers her criticism of Pauline and Cholly Breedlove with a critical assessment of the childhood that forms and shapes their adult character, she has no sympathy for those wealthy Afro-Americans who seek false definition of self through acquistion of property in "quiet black neighborhoods (67). Morrison's omniscient narrator observes that "[p]ropertied black people spent all their energies, all their love, on

their nests. Like frenzied, desperate birds, they overdecorated everything" (69). As owners of domestic space, a "thin brown girl" like Geraldine "build[s] her nest stick by stick, make[s] it her own inviolable world and stand[s] guard over its every plant, weed, doily, even against [her husband]" (69). Acquisitive ownership of space accompanies a stultifing inability on Geradine's part to respond on an emotional level. Sexually inhibited but skillful at faking orgasms with her husband, Geraldine transfers affection to her cat and experiences sexual pleasure when it rubs against her legs or lies on her lap. Sensing her attachment to the animal, Geradine's son, who has been carefully trained to reject black culture and custom, abuses the cat, whereas her husband reacts to her with complacent indifference. Pandering to the bourgeois value system marks women like Geraldine as "second rate," as Hovet and Lounsberry recognize (122). "They sing second soprano in the choir, sit in the second row, and 'although their voices are clear and steady, they are never picked to solo'" (Hovet 122). These women are content in their consciously chosen oppressive space, and this choice, in Morrison's estimation, is deadly to the black psyche.

Whereas Geraldine loses her moral and racial integrity by seeking material rather than human values, the characters in Beloved firmly adhere to a value system that is centered on the well-being of their people. Morrison describes these characters as

> people [who] could not live without value. [Having] no value in the white world,...they made their own, and they decided what was valuable. It was usually eleemosynary [charitable], usually something they were doing for somebody else. Nobody in the novel, no adult Black person survives by self-regard, narcissism, selfishness. (Washington 58)

Thus, concern for each other's welfare and devotion to one's family members constitutes the code of conduct Beloved's characters live by, a code founded on a belief in the spiritual principle of the universe. Sethe, for example, believes that everything that ever existed continues to exist as a cosmic force of good or evil. The nature of the space intrinsic to Sweet Home, then, remains in "rememory...out there, in the world...outside [Sethe's head]...[r]ight in the place where it happened" (36). Even if Sweet Home is no longer an actuality, Sethe knows it will

> never go[] away. Even if the whole farm - every tree and grass blade of it dies. The picture is still there and what's more, if you go there -- you who was never there -- if you go there and stand in the place where it was, it will happen again; it will be there for you, waiting for you. So, Denver, you can't never go there. Never. Because even though it's all over -- over and done with -- it's going to always be there waiting for you. That's how come I had to get all my children out. No matter what. (36)

Sethe warns Denver about such space because she realizes that a "rememory that belongs to somebody else" can appear in the space where it once was a physical reality (36). This concept makes Beloved's ghostly presence entirely plausible, and as long as she is incorporeal, her effect upon 124 Bluestone Road is oppressive rather than invasive.

In a review of Beloved, Judith Thurman explains Beloved's presence by citing Freud's essay "The Uncanny"; moreover, her explanation is equally relevant to an exploration of space (179). "The uncanny," as Freud defines it, is "that class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar" (Thurman 179). Thurman emphasizes that

> [t]he German word for uncanny is 'unheimlich' (and a haunted house is an 'unheimliches Haus'). But [Freud] interprets the prefix 'un' not as a grammatical negation of what is 'homelike' but as a 'token of repression' for what is most secretly terrifying and desirable about home -- what drives one away from it and compels one to resurrect it. (179)

According to Thurman, Beloved represents the repressed energies of the human body within the house, energies arising out of the conflict between the dreadful circumstance of her death and the need to keep her alive in memory. If Beloved is viewed in this way, Sethe's prepossession with the house is easier to understand, and her position regarding haunted space mirrors Morrison's regarding the history of her people. Commenting about her reasons for writing Beloved, Morrison says she wanted to

> explore...the interior life of black people...[in a] system that prevents...nurtur[ing] one's children. Books about slavery have only one plot: You're in it, and you want to get out of it. I didn't want my head and my life to be enslaved by slavery. I didn't think I had the emotional resources to stay in that world for the length of time it would take to do it, which is usually three, four, five years....Beloved [is] those black slaves whom we don't know, who survived [the middle] passage, who amounted to a nation who simply left one place, disappeared and didn't show up on the other shores. I had to be dragged...by them, kicking and screaming, into this book, because it was just too much. Then I thought to myself, 'It can't be. It just can't be. If it's too much to write about, then they have however won. If it can't be dealt with artistically, then I'm lost. (Smith 51)

Beloved is the artistic product of the interstice between the desire to repress and the complusion to resurrect the horrors of American slavery. To enter Beloved is to enter the timeless space of Sethe's rememory where the perversity of slavery and the indomitable spirit of the slaves intertwine in a Gordian knot so complex that the novel demands nonsequencial chronology and polyphonic voices.

In Beloved, the logical and causal untangling of events begins within the space of the gray and white house on 124 Bluestone Road because, like the Breedloves' house, it stands as a central metaphor for its inhabitant's "psychic" state. Just as the space within 124 is haunted, so too are its inhabitants, and the "dynamic rivalry" between the energy of the living and the "counter-energy" of the dead, to use Bachelard's terms, explains the novel's opening line: "124 was spiteful" (44, BEL 3). Variously described as "palsied," "colorless," "unsafe," "braced," "pitching," and "unfriendly," the house is no longer the secure space it was in the first days of Sethe's arrival when, as a way station, "124 rock[ed] with laughter, goodwill, and food for ninety," and enclosed within its walls "women friends, a mother-in-law, and all her children together...[as well as] neighbors...[who] discuss[ed]...weighty issues...[and delighted in] small victories" (137, 173). Since Beloved's death, the house is continuously in a state of flux. When Beloved's energy is active, the "outrageous behavior" of the house, whether "turned-over slop jars, smacks on the behind, [or] gusts of sour air," makes its inhabitants prudently watchful and discreet (4). But even when not active, Beloved's energy prevades the house, producing a "sadness that crouche[s] in corners, a second storey whose air is "charmed and very thin" (20, 11). For Sethe, "124 [is] so full of strong feeling... [that it] crowd[s] in on [her]...[leaving] no room for any other thing or

body" (39). Even though Baby Suggs knows that there is "[n]ot a house in the country ain't packed to the rafters with some dead Negroes grief," she is unable to reconcile 124's present spite with its former joy (5). Consequently, she takes to her bed and remains there eight years, "[s]uspended [in temporal, physical, and psychological space] between the nastiness of life and the meanness of death," before expiring (5, 3-4). Howard and Buglar, like Sammy Breedlove, flee the house before they are thirteen. Denver, like Pecola, lacks this option and learns to accommodate the nature of the house by recognizing that it has "acquire[d] the physical and moral energy of [its] human body" (Bachelard 46). Although Denver views the house "as a person rather than a structure...that wept, sighed, trembled and fell into fits," that is, as the spiritual Beloved, she also knows that "It's not the house. It's us! And it's you!" (29, 14).

As perceptive as Denver is, the loneliness she feels as a result of Sethe's preoccupation with the spirit of the house induces her retreat into a world of her own. Physically, this world encompasses the "murmuring leaves" and "emerald light" of her "boxwood" house where "secrets [are] sweet"; mentally, it colors and dominates all aspects of her life (28). The miracle of Denver's birth and of Beloved's ghostly presence gives meaning to her secret life, the import of which she never reveals to her mother or grandmother. Neither does Denver reveal the dark secret that dwells in the depths of her being: fear of the nameless thing that "comes from outside...the yard," the thing "that makes it all right [for Sethe] to kill her children" (205). In order to keep the nameless thing at bay and prevent her own death, Denver maintains a lonely vigil over the yard from within the house since she "need[s] to know what the thing might be" (205). Constant surveillance, however,

leaves Denver a virtual prisoner in, and of, space; the open space of the yard and the immense space beyond hold for her the terrors of the agoraphobic. Other than the brief span of time when Denver attends lessons at Lady Jones's house, she leaves 124 twice in eighteen years: once to attend Baby Suggs's internment, significant because death is the nameless thing, and once to accompany Paul D and her mother to a carnival, significant because this is space that alters, defies, and fractures reality. In prehistoric times, the carnival's purpose was to "'confuse forms' by means of the inversion of the social pattern, the juxtaposition of opposites and the unleashing of patterns" (Cooper 244). Not surprisingly, Beloved appears at 124 when Paul D, Sethe, and Denver return from the carnival — her appearance marks their entry into chaos, dissolution, and subsequent regeneration. The import of the carnival image acquires further signification when Paul D tells Stamp Paid that Beloved's arrival coincided with their visit to the carnival, to which Stamp Paid replies, "That's a bad sign," and when Sethe realizes who Beloved is and then dresses herself and her daughters "like carnival women." (235, 240). Drawing upon the fears of the agoraphobic, Morrison implies that these excursions into space carry with them attendant dangers for Denver's fragile psyche.

Fear of the nameless thing exerts such control over Denver that it directs both her conscious and unconscious states of mind. She represses all memory of Beloved's murder until Nelson Lord's inquiry about her sister's death causes a shadowy recollection to emerge: "I have seen my mother in a dark place, with scratching noises. A smell coming from her dress. I have been with her where something little watched us from the corners. And touched. Sometimes they touched" (206). This faint memory of Sethe's rat-infested jail cell, where she suckled her infant daughter

during her three-month prison term, plummets Denver into a world of silence. There, Denver learns to wordlessly communicate with the baby ghost, and the only thing she hears for two years is Beloved's breathing. The first thing that she hears when her psychosomatic condition ends is "the sound of [Beloved] crawling up the stairs" (205). In Denver's silent world and her world of sound, Beloved is the most significant entity in her life.

Sethe, however, dominates Denver's unconscious world. Each night, Denver dreams that Sethe cuts off her head and "carries it downstairs to braid [her] hair" (206). So overwhelming are her dreams that each day Denver consciously "spend[s] all [her] outside self loving Ma'am so she [won't] kill me, loving her even when she braids my head at night. I never let her know my daddy was coming for me" (207). The only way Denver can cope with the enormity of her fear is to believe in her father's eventual appearance. When Denver hears Paul D's voice downstairs, the sole male voice heard in the house since she was less than two months old, she thinks her father has arrived. Disappointed and resentful of Paul D's presence, Denver continues to wait "for her daddy to get here to help [her] watch out for Ma'am and anything come in the yard" (207). But watching and waiting leaves Denver, as Thurman says,

> comfort[ing] herself with carbohydrates and...daydreaming about the glorious adventure of her own birth, in a rowboat -- she was dragged form her mother's womb prematurely, by a young white girl. But Sethe has, in fact, never fully 'delivered' Denver. Fat, dreamy, submissive, fearful of the world, and fixated on her moment of entry into it, Denver will be forced to complete the labor herself. (178)

Though Thurman's description of Denver is accurate, the trauma of Denver's

life deserves further discussion. Denver is a child who has suckled Sethe's bloodied breasts after Beloved's murder, who has been told "die-witch! stories" by her brothers that illustrate how a mother kills her children, and who has neither friends nor community to sustain her (205). Until Denver forces herself to enter space outside 124, she is preoccupied with the circumstance of her birth -- the one story that celebrates her life -- because the other events are so secretly terrifying that confronting them is only possible once Beloved appears in the flesh.

The past is no less oppressive to those who survived Sweet Home, Kentucky, the plantation which Paul D assures Denver was neither "sweet" not "home" but which was, in fact, the origin of his misery, the root of his despair. Although Garner is far less brutal than schoolteacher, his system of slavery is more insidious because it belies the complete subservience of his slaves. Thurman argues that this "illusion of autonomy...is more debilitating, and perhaps, in the long run, crueller, than a full consciousness of servility" (177). Under Garner's rule and within Sweet Home's parameters, the treatment accorded slaves exceeds Southern propriety. Males are not bred as studs; women are not directed to copulate with men of their master's choosing. Sethe is free to choose Halle as her husband just as he is free to learn to read and to buy Baby Suggs' freedom. All Garner's slaves work independently and are "believed," "trusted," and "listened to" (125). But outside the boundaries of Sweet Home, "[t]hey were trespassers among the human race. Watchdogs without teeth; steer bulls without horns; gelded workhorses whose neigh and whinny could not be translated into a language responsible human spoke" (125). Recognizing the contradiction between Sweet Home and the outside world, between Garner and schoolteacher, Paul D finds himself, twenty years later, still questioning his manhood:

> Garner called and announced them men -- but only on Sweet Home, and by his leave. Was he naming what he saw or creating what he did not? That was the wonder of Sixo, and even Halle; it was always clear to Paul D that those two were men whether Garner said or not. It troubled him that, concerning his own manhood, he could not satisfy himself on the point. Oh, he did manly things, but was that Garner's gift or his own free will? What would he have been anyway -- before Sweet Home -- without Garner? In Sixo's country, or his mother's? Or, God help him, on the boat? Did a white man saying it make it so? Suppose Garner woke up one morning and changed his mind? Took the word away...they had been isolated in a wonderful lie, dismissing Halle's and Baby Suggs' life before Sweet Home as bad luck. Ignorant of or amused by Sixo's stories. Protected and convinced they were special. Never suspecting the problem of Alfred, Georgia.... (220-221)

Garner's identification of his slaves as men does little to eradicate what Carol Iannone describes as "the psychological and emotional effects of being owned -- of having no sense of self, of fearing to trust or to love when anything can be taken away at any time" (17). As Paul D becomes cognizant of how slavery has affected him, so too does the reader begin to recognize "the very limited consciousness of...slaves and ex-slaves, and of their painful slow growth toward damaged self-awareness" (Iannone 17). Paul D realizes that Sweet Home was not a home but a "cradle," and slaves like himself were not men but children, ignorant of the standard model in which slavery operates. With Garner's death and schoolteacher's arrival, the "cradle...split[s]," and Paul D discovers he has been his "master's creature[] all along" (219), "How about that?" he muses. "Everything rested on Garner being alive. Without his life each of theirs fell to

pieces. Now ain't that slavery or what is it?" (220)"

The difference between Garner's and schoolteacher's system of slavery is, as it turns out, merely a matter of degree. Morrison's stylistic device of not capitalizing "schoolteacher" signifies the essential identity between the word and what it denotes, that is, all that is ludicrous and incongruous in schoolteacher's conduct. Morrison refuses to give schoolteacher supremacy through giving him a specific, individual name in order to diminish him by profession as a person. Like Jacques Derrida, Morrison investigates schoolteacher's identity in language through the name she chooses for him. Thus, she exposes the similarity between the self and the name through schoolteacher's "signature," a term Derrida uses to develop his idea that the letters of the proper name constitute the "key" in which one's life is played out. Morrison links language with reality when she uses a common noun as a proper name and, thereby, incorporates Derrida's third level of the signature, antonomasis. Schoolteacher's name, then, expresses that aspect of his personality which disciplines and directs, not which imparts knowledge except to pass on his racial prejudice to his nephews.

Wanting absolute rather than limited control, schoolteacher sets about to "reeducate" the slaves by withdrawing the privileges granted by Garner and imposing a code of his own, which he believes will right the master/slave relationship. However, repressive measures like food rationing and corporal punishment do more to incite resistance than to induce resignation. When Sixo "steals" a shoat and schoolteacher confronts him, Sixo answers his master's questions with a form of dialogue reminiscent of Socrates' philosophical discourse but, here, specific to the "Old Marster and John" tales from Afro-American folklore. As Martha Bayles[7] establishes, "Sixo defends himself by saying that he can't be

stealing, since he himself belongs to the master. By eating good meat, he is only using one item of the master's property to improve another" (39). Sixo redefines schoolteacher's accusation and makes a serious ideological point through rhetoric, which demonstrates his argumentative superiority and, at the same time, critiques white supremacy. Though Sixo outsmarts schoolteacher, his master has the power to demonstrate that "definitions belong[] to the definer -- not the defined" (190). Thus as a show of absolute power, schoolteacher devises a punishment that affects both Sixo and the other slaves; he beats Sixo, ties him with the stock at night, forbids guns, and locks every building, pen, and bin on the plantation. Pilfering now becomes the slave's "obligation" (191). Moreover, these repressive measures induce the slaves to form a covert alliance and devise a plan to escape the now intolerably oppressive space of Sweet Home, space which for Sethe becomes unbearable when she overhears schoolteacher instructing his pupils (using her as an example) on the finer points of anthropometry.

Schoolteacher metonymically stands for the racism in all western thinkers from Aristotle to Thomas Jefferson, Samuel G. Morton, Josiah C. Nott, or Paul Broca, all of whom "found the metaphor of a hierarchical 'great chain of being' useful" for furthering the idea of innate inferiority (Reed 1358).[8] Morrison believes that as long as credence is given to the idea of "inferior and superior people," racism will remain endemic in western thought (Horn 75). "Racism...[and] the rights of man," Morrison says, "[are both] intellectual idea[s]...[but racism] has always been a scholarly pursuit. It has been called religion, history, eugenics, biology, -- anything. But it [is] racism" (Horn 75). Morrison concludes that the person who makes judgements about blacks based on scientific evidence "doesn't even know [that] the word black has no scientific

meaning. Twenty thousand black people passed over into the white race every year in Reconstruction. Maybe it's the white stuff that's making us stupid" (Horn 75). With unerring perecption, Morrison recognizes the absurdity behind these "scientific" claims. Moreover, by focusing on the cold impersonality with which schoolteacher carries out his barbarous acts, whether burning Sixo or "milking" Sethe, Morrison inverts what James Reed describes, in an article on scientific racism, as the "ethnocentric... pyramind[] [created by] 18th-century natural philosophers...in which Europeans stood at the apex and blacks below, close to the ape" (1358). Sethe realizes schoolteacher's true nature when she queries Mrs. Garner about his use of the word "characteristics," and her horror upon understanding the implications of his "lessons" intensifies after a discusssion with Halle about schoolteacher's methods (194). Only then does she acknowledge the effect schoolteacher will have on her children. Although Paul D later states what Sethe leaves unstated, that there is "[n]othing in the world more dangerous than a white schoolteacher," she is, nonetheless, convinced that escape is imperative (266).

Despite careful precautions, schoolteacher discovers the slaves' clandestine plan, and space closes in on the male slaves as schoolteacher casts a dragnet which none of them manage to elude. With cold-blooded efficiency, schoolteacher metes out his punishment. Paul A is hanged. Sixo is labelled as incorrigible and burned alive; he dies, however, triumphantly celebrating Thirty-Mile Woman's escape and naming his unborn son in song. Halle's fate remains shrouded in speculation; apparently, he hides in the barn loft in order to escape detection and goes mad after watching schoolteacher's nephews suckle Sethe. Paul D, collared, shackled, and bridled, is sold first to Brandywine, whom he tries to kill, and then to a work camp in Alfred, Georgia where, in "grave[s] calling [themselves]

quarters," he and forty-five other slaves are literally buried alive each night (106). To be locked within the dark recesses of the earth is to be locked with the dark recesses of the mind, that space where psychic fragmentation begins. And as a metaphor, these "graves" represent the internment of a people within the boundaries of the slave states, the grave to "Sixty Million and more" people of African ancestry.

Imprisoned in this space, Paul D's "hands quit taking instruction. On their own they traveled. Nothing could stop them or get their attention. They would not hold his penis to urinate or a spoon to scoop lumps of lima beans into his mouth" (107). These tremors only stop when, released from his "grave" each morning and in the company of his fellow slaves, Paul D can focus on the "astonishingly beautiful field of feldspar," the mercy of Hi Man's morning and evening call, and the camaraderie found in singing of, or signifying,"[9] their sorrow while beating rocks that are alternately their women, their children, their master, their desires, that is, "the flirt whom folks called Life" (108, 109). Occasionally in an act as defiant and as subversively inspiring as Sixo's "theft" of the shoat, one of the men decides to "take[] a bit of foreskin with him to Jesus" rather than perform fellatio on the guards as part of the morning "breakfast" ritual (108). But nothing can lessen the isolated terror each man experiences when, caged for days on end during flood rains, they squat in muddy water warding off cottonmouths. Now space contracts, narrows, overwhelms, and Paul D finds himself alternately screaming and crying, yet uncertain as to whether he is actually doing either. When the ditch begins to collapse, the men dive in one collective movement under the iron bars, through the mud, and escape. The connotations surrounding their rescue by a band of sick Cherokee draw upon analogies between the two most oppressed groups in America and the crushing abuse of power that accounts for their

similar conditions. With characteristic irony, Morrison reminds readers of the rose named for the Cherokee before explaining that they are fugitives from a government that insists upon moving them to Oklahoma. Already devastated by the white man's diseases, this breakaway band chooses to live or die in space familiar to them and according to their own beliefs, whereas the slaves choose to take their chances as fugitives rather than live like caged animals.

With the abolition of slavery, Paul D is finally a "free man, but the experience of Sweet Home and Alfred, Georgia irrevocably changes him. As Walter Clemons explains, Paul D "stumble[s] into post-Civil war existence unable to free [himself] from memories of a system in which [he has] no rightful ownership of a Self" (74). Although he can move from place to place to convince himself that he is free of chains, Paul D's mind remains fettered by memories "so oppressive...that stifling [them] is a means of survival" (Clemons 74). The memory of Mister, the rooster who smiles at him as he leaves Sweet Home in chains, persists because Paul D realizes that, without the ability to exercise free will, he is "something...less than a chicken sitting in the sun on a tub" (72). From the moment that he sees Mister's smile, Paul D keeps all feeling "in the tobacco tin buried in his chest where a red heart used to be. Its lid rusted shut....[T]here was no red heart bright as Mister's comb beating in him" (72-73). The picture of Mister moving about freely in space seals Paul D's heart just as Alfred, Georgia "shut[s] down" the part of his mind that "dwell[s] on Halle's butter smeared face, Sixo's laughing...[or his own] trembling" (41). "The box," Paul D knows, "had done what Sweet Home had not, what working like an ass and living like a dog had not: drove him crazy so he would not lose his mind" (41). Through this paradox, Morrison reveals in her art what she describes in an interview with Elsie B. Washington as "the process by which

a people construct and deconstruct reality in order to be able to function in it" (58). In both Beloved and The Bluest Eye, Morrison's interest lies in "explor[ing] how a people...absorbs or rejects information...that is undigestable and unabsorbable, completely" (Washington 58). This process of selection prevents an absolute disconnection between psyche and body for Paul D. For others, like Pecola and Halle, disconnection between psyche and body is the only way they can function in reality.

Morrison creates the best-case example of slavery at Sweet Home not so schoolteacher or Alfred, Georgia will appear the more horrifying but to show that no form of slavery is digestable, absorbable. No matter how humane Garner is to his slaves, they are nonetheless, chattel and at the mercy of their master's whims. Each of Garner's slaves has been torn asunder by the practice of slaveholding which, as Margaret Atwood asserts, is

> the most viciously antifamily institution[] human beings have ever devised. The slaves are motherless, fatherless, deprived of their mates, their children, their kin. It is a world in which people suddenly vanish and are never seen again, not through accident or covert operation or terrorism, but as a matter of everyday legal policy. (49)

The acuity of Atwood's observation accords with that of Christina Davis who maintains that slavery and its economic organization destroys "family structures, traditional and culture links," the very things that "create identity," and replaces them with "forms of identification - places, roles, words, even names" that make evaluation of oneself hardly possible (151). If one lacks knowledge of one's past, there can be no "home" where, as Bachelard says, "[l]ife begins well...begins enclosed, protected, all warm in the bosom of the house [because] without its...unceasing...councils of

continuity...man [is] a dispersed being" (7). For Bachelard, "the bosom of the house" means that protected space where one brings past, present, and future together in the daydream whose valuation "mark[s] humanity in its depth" (6). But the great diaspora of Afro-Americans to plantations across the southern United States meant the loss of "dwelling-places of the past" in which autovalorization through daydreaming could occur (Bachelard 6). And without dwelling-places of the past, the concept of the self becomes a basic consideration for Baby Suggs and Sethe just as it is for Paul D.

Laborious work in the rice and tobacco fields of Carolina cripples Baby Suggs and leaves her, as she says, walking "like a three-legged dog," a metaphor that self-consciously reveals the intervention of the institution of slavery upon her definition of self; slavery both physically and psychologically maims her (139). She is, from the slaveholder's point of view, more animal than human, and so her children can be killed, sold, or traded as he sees fit, without even granting her a farewell. Nor is it out of character, in his eyes, that any remaining children and Baby Suggs's husband should run off as animals do. This conscious dehumanization of slaves also accounts for Baby Suggs's exploitation by a white straw boss who promises her she can keep one of her children in return for sex. Not only does he sell the child for lumber, but he leaves Baby Suggs pregnant again, and this deceptive web of barter and exchange, illustrates what Amanda Smith identifies as the "devastating effects [of slavery] on maternal instincts" (50). By the time Halle is born, Baby Suggs no longer studies the features of her children, believing he, too, will be taken from her (Smith 50). Ironically, the child that Baby Suggs turns away from is the one she keeps, the one who buys her freedom.

Though conditions improve with Baby Suggs' move to Sweet Home, her condition does not. Sweet Home is, undoubtedly,

> a marked improvement...[yet] sadness [remains] at her center, the desolate center where the self that was no self made its home. Sad as it was that she did not know where her children were buried or what they looked like if alive, fact was she knew more about them than she knew about herself, having never had the map to discover what she was like. Could she sing? (Was it nice to hear when she did?) Was she pretty? Was she a good friend? Could she have been a loving mother? A faithful wife? Have I got a sister and does she favor me? If my mother knew me would she like me? (140)

These questions, basic to confirmation of one's sense of self, reflect a lifetime of psychic deprivation that nothing but freedom itself can begin to mend. Having no interior map to guide her, that is, having been denied fundamental experiences that, together, constitute the individuality and identity of a person, Baby Suggs's soul remains desolate. She cannot belong to herself when she "belongs" to Garner; she cannot "own" herself when he identifies her as Jenny Whitlow. Baby Suggs's questions regarding "self" mirror Paul D's questions regarding manhood, and when "the question comes from <u>within</u> the personage," as Christina Davis avers, "its implications are staggering" because it means there is no dwelling-place of the past to stimulate the present or the future (153).

For the survivors of Sweet Home, then, there is a moment that is crucial to their development of "self." This moment comes for Sethe when Paul D bluntly states that she "has two feet,...not four" after he hears her account of Beloved's murder (165). Ironically, Paul D's pronouncement does more to precipitate Sethe's downward spiral into madness than any other single event, for to judge her in this way is to strike a death blow since children are her "best thing[s]," and she desperately needs to

nurture them as she has never been (273). As was commonplace on Southern plantations, Sethe's mother is returned to the fields long before her child is weaned; consequently, Sethe suckles a nursemaid, but only after the white babies are sated. Since mother and child rarely sleep in the same cabin because accessibility to the fields is considered before the needs of the child, Sethe remembers her mother as a figure in the distance, a woman in a straw hat bent over in a rice field. Only once does Sethe's mother speak intimately with her young daughter, when, in a macabre scene, she instructs Sethe to identify her if she should die by the circled cross burned under her breast. What Barbara Walker calls a "ubiquitious [symbol of] male-and-female...cosmic union" known as Woton's cross, symbolizes, in this context, its opposite: cosmic discord (64). The universe (or space) in which Sethe's mother lives is neither harmonious nor orderly, and sexual union too often means rape by white men. Woton's cross tattooed on her body is as ironic as the "smile" permanently etched on her face from frequently having a slave's bit in her mouth for extensive periods of time. Her rebellious nature causes her death, but by the time she is cut down from the gallows and dumped upon a pile of other corpses, her body is so decomposed that Sethe cannot distinguish her mother's tattoo. Psychic conflict over the manner of her mother's death and the failure to identify her mother as an individual manifests itself in Sethe as the inability to speak without stuttering, a condition that ends only when she meets Halle.

"House" as an extension of "home" denotes space within the clan that means knowledge of the past through participation in one's language group, one's religious group, one's social group. What Sethe knows of "home" she learns from Nan, the one-armed nursemaid who speaks only her African language but, nevertheless, manages to communicate with Sethe. Nan tells Sethe how she and Sethe's mother crossed the middle passage together and

endured repeated rape by the crew and, later, by slaveholders in America. All of the children born of these rapes, Sethe's mother threw away. Sethe, however, is named after a male slave her mother loved and, in the telling of this story, Nan affirms a mother's love for the child she never raised and never knew. Female transmission of knowledge and wisdom is of thematic importance in Beloved, as Christina Davis points out, and though the effects of separation of mother from child can never be redressed, Nan's narrative gives Sethe the only link she has with a dwelling-place of the past (154).

Having never known a mother's affectionate care and attention, Sethe places great emphasis on home and family. "Home" at Garner's plantation is a tiny dirt-floored shack, but unlike Pauline Breedlove, Sethe finds it infinitely more appealing than her employer's home. In order "to feel like some part of [Garner's house is] hers...to take the ugly out of it," Sethe decorates it with salsify and myrtle. Though Sethe is clearly, as Christina Davis says, "appropriating for herself the place where she is to work," these flowers, ancient symbols of happiness, fertility, and marriage, also carry a particular spiritual significance (152).[10] If one accedes to the symbolism of these flowers, one sees that, to Sethe, the house is ugly because it is sterile space indicative of the Garner's sterile marriage. So important is fecundity to Sethe that she performs this flower ritual to ensure fertility in her own marriage, and her belief in the power of this act is so strong that when she forgets the ritual, her daily tasks go awry.

Mrs. Garner fails to recognize the sacredness that Sethe feels toward home and family, and though she willingly assents to Sethe's marriage, she sees no need for ceremony. Though Mrs. Garner thinks Sethe's anxiety about her wedding is "sweet," she assumes that Sethe is pregnant, an assumption

that taints her good wishes and gift of earrings with an aftertaste of kindly condescension toward those of lesser rank. Years later, Sethe remininsces about the anomaly of her marriage:

> ...there wasn't going to be no ceremony, no preacher. Nothing. I thought there should be something -- something to say it was right and true. I didn't want it to be just me moving over a bit of pallet full of corn husks. Or just me bringing my night bucket into his cabin. I thought there should be a ceremony. Dancing maybe. A little sweet william in my hair....I never saw a wedding, but I saw Mrs. Garner's wedding gown in the press, and heard her go on about what it was like. Two pounds of currants in the cake, she said, and four whole sheep. The people were still eating the next day. That's what I wanted. A meal maybe, where me and Halle and all the Sweet Home men sat down and ate something special. Invite some of the other colored-people over by Covinton or High Trees -- those places Sixo used to sneak off to. But it wasn't going to be nothing. They said it was all right for us to be husband and wife and that was it. All of it. (58-59)

Consent from one's master constitutes marriage for slaves, and this attitude reveals how the Garners truly perceive their thrall. At variance with this perception, Sethe "creates her own way of consecrating her marriage" by stitching a gown from pilfered material, by consummating her union with Halle in the cornfield, and by eating the corn broken from the stalks with the Sweet Home men (Davis 152).[11] In other words, Sethe transforms, at least for the moment, Sweet Home's oppressive space into felicitous space.

With the birth of her children, however, Sethe finds the unnatural

solitude of mothering within the bounds of Sweet Home extremely burdensome because she is without the benefit of female family or friends. As Christina Davis notes, "[T]here is no older woman around to answer her questions about the right time to start feeding her children solid food, to devise methods of keeping them out of danger while she works" (152). When Sethe puts her children on the caravan heading north, she realizes that her actions are [g]ood and right" since she "couldn't love em proper in Kentucky because they wasn't mind to love" (162). Like Paul D, Sethe knows that denial of "the right or permission" to love as one chooses is an underlying tenet of oppression, one that destroys group or class solidarity that might bring about fundamental social change (162). In Beloved, not being allowed to love as one pleases gives rise to forms of love that border on the neurotic. For example, whereas Sethe's love is "thick," Paul D's love is "small," suitable only for

> [g]rass blades, salamanders, spiders, woodpeckers, beetles, a kingdom of ants. Anything bigger wouldn't do. A woman, a child, a brother -- a big love like that would split you wide open...to get to a place where you could love anything you chose -- not to need permission for desire -- well now, that was freedom. (162)

With these words, Paul D inadvertently defines oppressive space by defining free or soul space. Drawing upon Yi-Fu Tuan's Space and Place, Judith Fryer confirms Paul D's statement when she says that "[s]paciousness... means being free; freedom implies space. It means having the power and enough room in which to act" (49). Similarly, Kevin Lynch describes spaciousness as space "free to be entered or used, unobstructed, unrestricted, accessible, available, exposed, extended, candid, undetermined, loose, disengaged, responsive, ready to hear or see as in open heart, open eyes, open hand, open mind, open house, open city,...all

those [spaces]...open to...freely chosen and spontaneous actions" (108). Both Fryer and Lynch particularize space in which one is free to love, the kind of space Paul D seeks where one does not "need permission for desire"(162). Its antithesis is, of course, oppressive space where love is unavailable either because it is disallowed or constantly threatened, as in Beloved, or because characters are incapable of fully receiving or expressing love, as in The Bluest Eye. In both novels, the result of being confined to oppressive space is characters who are stunted human beings, a condition that manifests itself physically in Pauline's and Baby Suggs' limp, Paul D's trembling, Sethe's stuttering, Denver's deafness; and emotionally, in Cholly's sociopathic tendencies and Soaphead's pedophilia. When oppressive space becomes invaded space, characters exhibit even more extreme physical, as well as emotional, manifestations.

Notes

1. Besides Michael Awkward and Raymond Hedin, Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi, Phyllis R. Klotman, Vernessa C. White, Jacqueline de Weever, Barbarb Christian, Trudier Harris, Elliott Butlar-Evan and Elizabeth B. House analyze the importance of the primer to The Bluest Eye as a frame to indicate psychic fragmentation.

2. Most notably, Gilbert and Guber discuss spatial imagery in the works of Emily Dickinson, Charlotte and Emily Brontë, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and Sylvia Plath, but this kind of imagery is prevalent in the oldest extant literature where wives and slaves are imprisoned in the "house." One need only think of Antigone, Clytemnestra, or Penelope. And, of course, there is no more eloquent statement regarding "space" and the woman writer than Virginia Woolf's A Room of One's Own.

3. The space alloted Afro-Americans is a dominant theme in the works of William Faulkner who, in novels like A Light in August, Go Down Moses, Sartoris, and The Unvanquished indicts those who relegate Afro-Americans to "uninhabitable" space.

4. As early as 1907, Freud had pointed out the similarity between religious practices and obsessive actions, even before he had brought out the special connections between eroticism and obsessional behavior. See Sigmund Freud. The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Trans. James Strachey, Anna Freud, Alix Strachey, and Alan Tyson. Ed. James Strachey, 24 vols. (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1957) 9: 117-127, 169-175.

5. For an analysis of "funk" in The Bluest Eye, Sula, Song of Solomon, and Tar Baby, see Susan Willis, "Eruptions of Funk: Historicizing Toni Morrison," Black American Literature Forum 16 (Spring 1982) 34-42.

6. In distinguishing "type" from "stereotype," Trudier Harris argues that the stereotypical mammy's "self-respect was lost in groveling before and fawning upon her mistress, master, and young white charges. Her loyalty became self-effacement and her affection anticipated the exaggeration of the ministrel tradition. Her piety and patience worked more often than not in favor of the whites, and her tyranny was most ruthless when it was exercised over other Blacks. Devoted she was, but...she also believed in aping white manners, and, if she was not servile, she certainly believed herself inferior to those for whom she worked." Trudier Harris, From Mammies to Militants: Domestics in Black American Literature, (Philidelphia: Temple UP, 1982) 36.

7. Bayles censures Morrison for presenting the "shoat scene" as "part of her own narration." However, Jim's response to Huckleberry Finn regarding the French language is also reminiscent of the Marster and John format. Both Twain and Morrison leave it to the reader to make the connection to Afro-American folklore. See Martha Bayles, "Special effects, special pleading," The New Criterion, January 1988: 39 on the Marster/slave dialogue.

8. In America, Thomas Jefferson's Notes on the State of Virginia (1786) formally argued for black inferiority, while Samuel G. Morton's (1799-1851) work promoted "polygenism," the theory that blacks were an entirely separate race from whites. Josiah C. Nott (1804-73), a southern physician and Morton's disciple, wrote Types of Man, which also endeavored to demonstrate that blacks were an inferior race. In Europe, Paul Broca (1824-80), a French surgeon, was the unquestioned leader of craniometry, a

science dealing with cranial measurement. See James Reed, "Racism, Scientific," Encyclopedia of Southern Culture, (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina Press, 1989) 1358-59.

9. Roger D. Abrahams defines signifying in black discourse as a "technique of indirect argument or persuasion...a language of implication... [using] indirect verbal or gestural means...the language of trickery, that set of words or gestures achieving Hamlet's 'direction through indirection'... one does not signify something; rather, one signifies in some way." Roger D. Abrahams, Deep Down in the Jungle...: Negro Narrative Folklore from the Streets of Philadelphia (Chicago: Aldine, 1970) 53.

10. Although I can find nothing specifically symbolic regarding the herb salsify, Sethe obviously believes in its magical properties. Myrtle, however, symbolizes "[j]oy; peace; tranquility; happiness; victory; the feminine principle..." (J.C. Cooper, An Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Tradional Symbols, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978) 110. Besides stating that the word myrtle meant "female genitals" in Greek, Barbara G. Walker informs us that the berry meant the clitoris. Barbara G. Walker, The Women's Dictionary of Symbols and Sacred Objects, (San Francisco: Harper, 1988) 449.

11. See the symbolic meaning of corn in Sethe's love, which in its oldest connotations was seen as "the offspring of the marriage of luminous sun with the virgin earth." J.C. Cooper, An Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Tradional Symbols, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978) 42-43.

Chapter II

Invaded Space

> Personal space refers to an area with invisible boundaries surrounding a person's body into which intruders may not come.
>
> Robert Sommer, Personal Space: The Behavioral Basis of Design

If one applies Robert Sommer's definition of personal space to the home as "body and soul," then invasion of space can mean intrusion into space with invisible boundaries, space where the body is housed (7). Invaded space, as it relates to The Bluest Eye and Beloved, is "dangerous" space, different from oppressive space in that it does not just weigh heavy on the mind and spirit: it threatens to destroy mind, body, and spirit. In these novels, trespassers invade both the house and the body, and whether the invasion is by a female into male "territory" or by a male into female "territory," whether the invasion is innocent or intentional, it is the less powerful female who is at risk. In The Bluest Eye, for example, Pecola faces psychological, verbal, and physical abuse when she innocently invades the space of others more powerful than she is, abuse which makes her father's incestuous invasion of her body in the "protective" space of her own house even more tragic. Paul D and Bodwin, on the other hand, innocently enter 124 Bluestone Road, and the implied threat causes Beloved's literal invasion of the house (with disasterous effects for Sethe and Denver) in the former instance and Beloved's disappearance and Sethe's longing for death in the latter.

Although not specifically relating invasion of space to rape, Madonne M. Miner, in her article "Lady No Longer Sings the Blues: Rape, Madness, and Silence in The Bluest Eye, "explore[s] intersections among Philomela's, Persephone's, and Pecola's rape (177). Any exploration of rape, however, has at its center the concept of invasion. Because a woman can be raped, male invasion of personal female space always carries with it the threat of actual invasion of the female body. Female invasion of male space is similarly dangerous to a woman because it is seen as a transgression whereby the female risks rape for having violated sacred male space. Invaded space, then, becomes power-laden, which means that the person with the lesser power is in danger. Hence, an innocent "invader" like Pecola can be psychologically violated and physically abused by a more powerful female just as the adolescent Cholly can be emasculated (made to feel female and raped) when he enters sanctified male space, an alley in Macon, where his father, Samson Fuller, shoots craps.[1] With utter contempt and disgust, Fuller emasculates his son by using sexually explicit language: "Tell that bitch she get her money. Now, get the fuck outta my face" (123). Fuller figuratively "fucks" Cholly, damns him by denying patrimony and by aligning him with his "bitch" mother, a violation that deprives Cholly of all strength and vigor. Only with great effort and concentration can Cholly walk out of the alley, where he weakens, collapses on a crate, and defecates. Mortified by his physiological reaction, Cholly then runs blindly until he drops, paralyzed in a fetal position under a pier by the Ocmulgee River. In terms of Miner's statements about rape and power, Cholly

reacts like the typical rape victim.

Outlining the structural similarities between Philomela's and Pecola's rape, Miner says that

> in various ways and at various costs, the female figure suffers violation...[and] with this violation a man asserts his presence as 'master,' 'man-in-control,' or 'god' at the expense of a young woman who exists only as someone to 'impress upon'... [F]ollowing the violation/assertion, this woman suffers an enclosure or undesirable transformation; she cowers, shrinks, or resides behind walls of madness. Finally, the most characteristic example of violation/assertion/destruction occurs within the family matrix. (178-180)

Furthermore, Miner affirms that "Men, potential rapists, assume presence, language, and reason as their particular province. Women, potential victims, fall prey to absence, silence, and madness" (181). Miner's association of behavior with space or "province" permeates The Bluest Eye and Beloved, and the dichotomous nature of such behavior sets up an opposition bridged only when a character like Paul D emerges, who finally understands that love is not assertion but acceptance and validation of the Other.

What prevents Beloved from becoming tragedy, then, places The Bluest Eye within this realm because there is no sustaining acceptance or validation of members within the Breedlove family. In fact, each instance of invasion of the house occurs with ever-darkening implications, culminating in Cholly's invasion of Pecola's body. Pecola's innocent entry into the MacTeer's house has ominous import because she begins to menstruate there, an equally innocent physiological action, but one that will result in pregnancy when Cholly rapes her.

Each successive entry into a "house" further undermines Pecola's self-esteem. Whether the one trespassed against is a white male immigrant, a lighter-skinned boy and his socially conscious mother, a self-hating parent, or a misanthropic soothsayer, each one attacks Pecola as a means of upholding his or her precarious position in an hierarchical system ranked according to race, sex, and class. The psychological, verbal, and physical abuse Pecola experiences during these encounters foreshadow her eventual sexual abuse, since they erode any possibility of self-validation through interaction with one's community or one's family members; she becomes the "perfect" victim for her father's incestuous desires.

While Pecola's entry into Mr. Yacobowski's store -- or "house," in that is is personally "owned" by him even though it is "public" space -- is strictly for economic reasons, it is, in fact, a lesson in the politics of race, sex, and class.[2] In an interview with Bonnie Angelo, Morrison expresses her views on the placement of immigrants in America's hierarchical structuring. Morrison says that historically Afro-Americans have been used as a shield for various factional powers "to prevent class war...[and] conflagrations," that without Afro-Americans, the country "would have been Balkanized" (68). According to Morrison, becoming an American meant that all immigrants had one thing in common: "contempt for <u>me</u>," an attitude based on "exclusion....They could all say, 'I am not <u>that</u>.'" Further, Morrison asserts that

> [w]hen they got off the boat, the second word they learned was 'nigger.'...I remember in the fifth grade a smart little boy who had just arrived and didn't speak any English...sat next to me....I taught him to read just by doing it....[T]he moment he found out that I was black -- a nigger...[was] the moment when

> he belonged, that was his entrance. Every immigrant knew he would not come at the very bottom. He had to come above at least one group -- and that was us. (Angelo 68)

Morrison's comments shed light on Mr. Yacobowski's character; as proprieter of the neighbourhood store, he attempts to mollify his own "sensibilities blunted by a permanent sense of loss," contempt, in other words, for his position as a immigrant, by categorically despising those with less power and position (42). Focusing on what Miner delineates as "the processes of identity construction and personal integration involv[ing] an extremely sensitive and constantly shifting balance between seeing and being seen," Morrison illustrates, in this scene, the importance of the "gaze" upon one's self-perception (184).[3] Mr. Yacobowski assumes presence by looking at Pecola but refusing to acknowledge her; his blue, "blear[y] dropped eyes" reveal "total absence of human recognition" because "there is nothing to see" (42). In the "glazed separateness" of the storeowner's eyes, Pecola detects the distasteful look she sees in all "white eyes" when they look at her, knowing that it is her blackness they disapprove of, her blackness which absents her (42). Having effectively silenced Pecloa with his gaze, Mr. Yacobowski then uses language, a series of brusquely impatient questions, which establish her as incapable of reasoning or making simple decisions: "Yeah?....What? These? These?....Christ. Kantcha talk?....Well, why'nt you say? One? How many?" (42). Mr. Yacobowski's refusal to see or listen to Pecola translates into a refusal to touch the little balck girl whose view of the world is "incomprehemsible to him" (42). Only "[h]is nails graze her damp plam as he takes Pecola's money (42).

Outside the store, as Miner observes, Pecola rejects the dandelions that she previously "grant[ed]...a reality...which redound[ed] to

include... herself" (184). Having previously bestowed presence upon the dandelions by wondering why they are designated as weeds, by acknowledging their value as ingredients in soup and wine, and by peering into their heads, Pecola now rejects them as "ugly...weeds" because, like Mr. Yacobowski, they "do not look at her and...send love back" (43). Miner argues that "[b]efore contact with this white male, Pecola creates belief in both a world and a self; following contact with Mr. Yacobowski, her conjuring powers impaired, she abandons the effort" (185). Pecola, preoccupied with her new classification of dandelions, trips on the cracked sidewalk she had earlier "owned" and becomes angry, an emotion that "is better" than shame because "[t]here is a sense of being in anger. A reality and presence. An awareness of worth....Her thoughts fall back to Mr. Yacobowski's eyes, his phlegmy voice. The anger will not hold....the shame wells up again, its muddy rivulets seeping into her eyes....She remembers the Mary Janes" (43). The eyes of the smiling, blond, blue-eyed Mary Jane on the candy wrapper are "pretty" to Pecola; the candy's sweetness "is good" (43). Equating "pretty" with "good" and eating with transfiguation, Pecola deduces that "[t]o eat the candy is somehow to eat the eyes, eat Mary Jane. Love Mary Jane. Be Mary Jane" (43). What Pecola is too young to realize is that her encounter with Mr. Yacobowski results in an undesirable transformation, particularly when sensual pleasure assumes priority, her "three pennies ha[ving] bought her nine lovely orgasms with Mary Jane" (43). Reconstruction of self after Mr. Yacobowski's assault involves substituting her desire for affirmation with that which gives immediate gratification to the palate. The sensual gratification that occurs when Pecola identifies so strongly with Mary Jane that she is one with her, foreshadows her complete loss of identity in the schizophrenic world she enters after placing her last hope for

salvation in Soaphead Church.

Mr. Yacobowski represents the only white male with whom Pecola has contact, and his placement in the novel is instrumental in elucidating the hierarchical structuring of racist, sexist, and classist ideology. Since the "best" and most powerful person in America is the rich, white male, anyone who can fit one of these catagories is inherently superior to those who cannot. An ugly, black, poverty-stricken female automatically occupies the least desirable space in society's graduated scheme of rank and order and bears the projected self-loathing of black and white alike, who cannot meet the standard criteria for full acceptance. Externatization of blame and guilt within this system becomes perfectly logical, however perverted; thus, Junior's deliberate, deceptive and cruel treatment of Pecola is a projection of all that he loathes about himself.

Junior, carefully groomed to see himself as "colored" rather than as a "nigger," delights in "bullying girls...[because] it makes him feel good," and projects onto a "perfect, defeated victim," as Morrison calls Pecola, all his irrational hostility for those of his own kind (Strouse 56). Seeing Pecola walking through the playground with her head down, Junior accuses her of entering his "yard," space where he is "in charge," and although Pecola momentarily protests, she assents to Junior's display of power and begins to walk away (72). Quickly changing his tactics, Junior asks her to play, but this activity does not interest her either. Only when Junior promises to show new-born kittens to her if she accompanies him to his house is Pecola persuaded to follow him. Like the adult child molester Soaphead, Junior (whose name designates him as holding a lower position in the hierarchy of such men) already understands how the promise of pleasure or reward lures the victim into

territory where he can accomplish his end. Though Pecola lags behind and hesitantly enters the house, evidently fearful of Junior's parents, Junior reassures her that "There's nobody here" (73). Everything about the house, another of Morrison's meticulously conceived interiors, bespeaks "a sense of order and stability...the symbolic encoding of the myth of respectability," as Elliot Butlar-Evan concludes (72). The "red-and-gold Bible," the "[l]ittle lace doilies," the [p]otted plants," the "picture of Jesus...with the prettiest paper flowers fastened to the frame," the "green-and-gold [lamp with the] white shade," the "rug...with the enormous dark-red flowers" evoke Pecola's admiration (73).

Yet the red Bible and blood-red flowers signal danger just as the red door does on Dick-and-Jane's house. And it is while Pecola is "in admiration of the flowers" that Junior hurls the cat in her face (73). Pecola reacts to this violation, the first step in Miner's definition of the rape process, by "suck[ing] in her breath in fear" (73). Junior then asserts himself by laughing raucously, barring her escape, calling her his "prisoner," pushing her down, and shutting her in the room (73). The cat's movement about Pecola's legs distracts her from her dilemma, however, and while stroking the cat, Pecola is transfixed by "the blue eyes in the black face," as Jacqueline de Weever notes, recognizing in the cat her own face should she be granted blue eyes (407). Junior rages when he opens the door and sees the cat responding to Pecola in the same way that it responds to Geraldine. Grabbing the cat by one hind leg and swinging it above his head, Junior wards off Pecola's efforts to stop him until they both fall, and the cat is thrown against the window.

As if by design, Geraldine returns, and Junior accuses Pecola, the innocent victim of his malice, of killing the cat whose "blue eyes [are] closed, leaving only an empty, black, helpless face," a face, one

assumes, like Pecola's at this moment (75). In Pecola's dirty torn dress, matted plaited hair, cheap muddy shoes, and loose hem held together with a safety pin, Geraldine sees all that she escaped when she came North to a place where she "construct[s] inviolable worlds," as Miner explains, "by imposing strict boundaries between the acceptable and the unacceptable" (185). Geraldine says in a quiet voice, but one echoing her son's rhetoric in the playground, "You nasty little black bitch. Get out of my house" (75). As Pecola backs away and turns to leave, "Jesus look[ed] down at her with sad and surprised eyes...the gay paper flowers twisted around his face" (76).

Jesus, a deity in this context of the white bourgeoisie to whom Geraldine aspires, though grieved, anticipates the consequence of someone of Pecola's ilk entering space unavailable to her. This Jesus is not the Jesus who, in the Book of Mark, suffers little children to come unto him, but one who blesses upwardly mobile Afro-Americans from Mobile, Alabama,[4] who have been absorbed into the traditions of the majority culture, who accept Him as their own and adorn Him with artificial flowers. He functions for Geraldine because she sees herself as white, but as Morrison makes clear, Geraldine's adoration is inherently "artificial." In Cynthia Dubin Edelberg's examination of Morrison's first three novels, she perceives various repetitions of the same ideological point Morrison makes here: "the Bible is not the right book for black Americans" (228). Understanding too well the expression on Jesus's face and the implications of her entry into Geraldine's "inviolable world" where even her husband is "an intruder," Pecola cannot hold her head "low enough to avoid seeing the snowflakes falling and dying on the pavement" (69, 70, 76). Having suffered violation/assertion/destruction, Pecola shrinks, seeing in the falling, dying snow her own fall and metaphoric death.

This sequence of violation/assertion/destruction escalates when Pecola enters the Fishers's kitchen, and mother turns against daughter. In her discussion of Northern mammies, Trudier Harris demonstrates how "by the very nature of their work, [mammies] set constricting boundaries on what [children] may or may not do in 'her' kitchen. Pauline Breedlove draws boundary lines in such a way as to cast her child from cleanliness, beauty, and good food" (65). Pauline immediately tells Pecola not to move once she enters the kitchen, but inevitably, one clumsy gesture topples the blueberry cobbler set to cool on the counter, its contents desecrating the immaculate white kitchen. Enraged, Pauline knocks Pecola to the floor, "spit[s] out...like rotten pieces of apple...' get on out of here,'" and refuses to acknowledge Pecola as her daughter in front of the Fishers' little girl (87). Echoing Geraldine's words, Pauline (whose similar name suggests their parallel personalities) renders Pecola invisible with her directive to "get on out of here"; neither woman wants her within their visual range. And while a mother's refusal to bestow presence upon her daughter is the more tragic scenario, one sees in Pauline's and Geraldine's reactions to Pecola's invasion of their space similarities that point to deeper denials, those that Butlar-Evans says work to empower these women. Citing "denial of sex, the suppression of the erotic...[as] social suppression...[or] control that imprisons," Butlar-Evans regards "sexuality [as] the domain of empowerment and enslavement for Pauline (as it was for Geraldine)" (72, 73, 76). Such suppression will necessarily manifest itself as violence whenever the empowerment these women find in controlling and ordering their sexuality appears to be threatened by Pecola's disheveled funkiness. Both women aspire to the same values, control their own households, and emasculate their husbands. In these ways, both women assume presence through

control and reduce others to silence; thus, in an inversion of the male power structure, they do irreparable damage by contributing to female isolation that fosters absence, silence, and madness. Unlike her behavior during her encounter with Junior, Pecola never asserts herself during her confrontations with Geraldine and Pauline; she merely leaves their "territory," a silenced, debilitated eleven-year-old.

Although Mr. Henry's entry into the MacTeer household has no effect on Pecola, it sets up an opposition between the MacTeer and Breedlove households that demonstrates the meaning of protective space to the children within them. Mr. Henry, a "steady worker with quiet ways," has not married, Mrs. MacTeer and her friends decide, because he is either "picky" or "sensible," never suspecting that he is a pedophile and client of the town's prostitutes (16). Frieda and Claudia "love" him because he plays the magician, allowing them to search his body for an illusory penny, but his "play" takes on a dissolute tone as Morrison carefully delineates his character in subsequent scenes. Meeting the girls later while he is in his bathrobe, Mr. Henry sends them off to buy ice cream so that he can consort with China and Maginot Line who, as Claudia says, were "in our house," a violation heightened by the sexual implication of Mr. Henry's sucking China's fingers. After Mr. Henry fondles Frieda's breasts and is ousted from the premise, the "house...bursts with an uneasy quiet," a reflection of what Claudia calls Mrs. MacTeer's "strange" behavior (78). In a humorous scene in which the sobbing Frieda relates the incident to Claudia, she inadvertently explains how the outrage of the community solidifies against Mr. Henry, sending him scurrying for his life:

> ...when Daddy saw him come up on the porch, he threw our old tricycle at him and knocked him off the porch....Then Mama hit

> him with a broom and told him to keep the Lord's name out of his mouth, but he wouldn't stop [singing], and Daddy was cussing, and everybody was screaming....Mr. Buford came running out with his gun, and Mama told him to go somewhere and sit down, and Daddy said no, give him the gun, and Mr. Buford did, and Mama screamed, and Mr. Henry shut up and started running, and Daddy shot at him and Mr. Henry jumped out of his shoes and kept on running in his socks. Then Rosemary came out and said that Daddy was going to jail and I hit her....Miss Dunion came in after everybody was quiet, and Mama and Daddy was fussing about who let Mr. Henry in anyway, and she said Mama should take me to the doctor, because I might be ruined, and Mama started screaming all over again. (80)

No matter how confusing this incident is to Frieda and Claudia, who decide Frieda will not be "ruined' if she drinks whiskey so as not to become fat like Maginot Line, the point is that they are protected from a child molester by parents and neighbours who will not allow the sanctity of the body or the house to be violated. Linda M. Wagner "see[s] the McTeer [sic] family as unified and protective, practical enough to take on a boarder, sensible enough to get rid of him when he tries to abuse Frieda. We see a loving family, whose values surface in their daughters in the scenes of boys taunting Pecola and Maureen Peal's taking advantage of her" (193-94). Moreover because her parents defend Frieda, Claudia retrospectively comments, "[T]here was no bitterness in our memory [of Mr. Henry]" (16). Frieda survives the incident unscathed.

The Breedloves, on the contrary, offer Pecola no protection, thereby opening the door for the various forms of abuse their daughter suffers. As parents, Pauline and Cholly exemplify the family matrix in which

incest is apt to occur: "multiple stresses, marital disharmony or disruption, role reversals between parents and siblings, the evolution of inappropriate sexual activity between family members, relatively immature and dependent parents, frequent absence from the home of the parent of the same sex, and alcoholism," as Herschel D. Rosenzweig explains (Baum 103). While the causes of incest are evident in Morrison's portrayal of the Breedlove family, the most frightening thing about Pecola's rape is that her innocent gesture (scratching her calf with her foot) reminds the alcohol-besotted Cholly of the first time he met Pauline and moves him from a series of self-directed hateful emotions to "wondrous softness... protective[]" but dangerous emotions in regards to Pecola (128). In a "desire for confirmation of his presence," as Miner astutely puts it, since neither Pauline nor Pecola sees him approach them from behind, Cholly reacts as he did when Pauline made the same gesture: he catches Pecola's foot in his hand and nibbles on her calf. Analyzing Cholly's reaction, Miner establishes that what is "[o]f consequence here is... Cholly's belief that he can regain an earlier perception of himself as young, carefree, and whimsical by using his girl/woman as medium" (180). Pecola's reaction, however, is not laughter as her mother's had been, but rigidity and shocked silence, a "better" response Cholly discovers, in that it arouses him sexually.

"Thus, on a literal level, " Miner reasons, "Cholly expands as Pecola contracts" (180). Having crossed the boundaries of propriety, Cholly will assert himself into Pecola's body even though "[s]urrounding all this lust was a border of politeness," an outer edge of decency, in other words; "[Cholly] wanted to fuck her -- tenderly" (128). Yet he cannot remain stationed in this "polite" hinterland because Pecola's virginity forces him to enter her "with one gigantic thrust" (128). The

only sound Pecola makes is "a hollow suck of air in the back of her throat. Like the rapid loss of air from a circus balloon" (128). The triad of violation/assertion/destruction complete, Pecola faints as Cholly "snatche[s] his genitals out of the dry harbor of her vagina" (128). The final "[d]epresencing" of Pecola takes place, Miner states, when Pauline finds her unconscious, refuses to believe rape has occurred, and beats her unmercifully. "Pecola must," Miner continues, "recognize the futility of attempted communication. Thus when Cholly...rapes a second time, Pecola keeps the story to herself; in silence this eleven-year-old girl steps across commonly accepted borders of reason and speech to enter her own personal world of silence and madness" (180). Marco Portales believes that Morrison, "despite her essentially sympathetic rendition of events in Cholly's life...[has him rape a second time] because...a character like Cholly would indeed try again" (504). The first incident of rape cannot be explained Portales concludes, "as the lamentable but nonetheless explainable lapse of a drunken man" (505). Furthermore, Cholly's literal rape of his daughter cannot be separated from his figurative rape of her mind. He leaves her womb impregnated and her mind in turmoil; Soaphead ensures that she plummets into an abyss from which she will never return.

As the last character introduced, Soaphead ties together all the threads of the tapestry of characters Morrison weaves throughout the novel. Barbara Christian offers a cogent analysis of Morrison's depiction of this character when she defines how his "philosophy of misanthropy" encompasses the various strains of the mournful chorus resonating from the voices of the other characters (149). Christian says,

> [Soaphead's] distorted view of life flows from the same causes

> that transform Mrs. Breedlove into a cruel martyr of a mother, the same causes that impress upon Cholly Breedlove his own unworthiness, his own ugliness, the same causes that will inspire Pecola Breedlove to ask this clean old man to give her blue eyes....[Geraldine], in her prissy asexual cleanliness, is identified with cats, as Soaphead...in his mangy cleanliness is identified with an old dog. She breeds Soapheads, the only end to which her generation could come, for as her son Junior already grasps, there is a dainty, cold self-hatred at her core. So Maureen Peal is connected to Geraldine who is connected to Soaphead who in turn is connected to Mr. Henry and so on. All of them are connected to Pecola who dramatically manifests their insanity by revealing the disease for what it is. (149, 151)

Christian makes the connection between Mr. Henry and Soaphead more explicit when she writes,

> Soaphead loves little girls whose bodies seem to him the least offensive of all human beings. Like Mr. Henry, he is a clean old man. But unlike Mr. Henry, this philosopher's attraction for little girls is rooted in his intense dislike for human beings in general, who in their physical and cultural forms are imperfect, in a continual state of decay. (149)

These little girls exist for Soaphead only as people upon whom he can assert his presence as "master" -- he chooses girls rather than boys because they are "usually manageable and [in his mind] frequently seductive" (132). Their breasts, Soaphead says, "[c]ommand[ed him] to touch [them]" (144). Even though Soaphead controls the situation each time the girls come to his apartment, he rationalizes that his pedophilia

is "playful" (as does Mr. Henry), that the girls "didn't mind at all" or else why "would they have come back" (142, 143). Using the arguments all pedophiles put forth, Soaphead abdicates himself from responsibility, never realizing that he is manipulating the innocence of children or that they return for mints, money, and ice cream, not because they are sexually stimulated.

Soaphead is the only character whose white heritage is explicitly profiled, and if he puts the other characters into perspective, then Morrison sees the infusion of white blood as the contaminant of her race. Convinced of their superiority, Soaphead's mulatto family dedicates itself to "prov[ing] beyond a doubt De Govineau's hypothesis that 'all civilizations derive from the white race, that none can exist without its help, and that a society is great and brilliant only so far as it preserves the blood of the noble group that created it" (133). To uphold this conviction after several professional failures, Soaphead, quite naturally, gravitates to the profession of spiritualist and psychic where he can maintain his image as master over "lesser" blacks. Thus, when Pecola enters Soaphead's back-room apartment, appropriate space for the pseudo-psychic to exercise his authority in an inconspicuous and indirect way, he grants her desperate plea for blue eyes because, as Christian explains, "he [grew] up...seeing the sterile ugliness of the need to be British, this need to erase color, all vitality, all funk, out of life" (149). Pecola's "request makes total sense to him," Christian says, "for he, more than any other character in the book intellectualizes the pain, the self-mutilation, inherent in that request" (150). Soaphead, thereby, can remove himself from the sphere of moral sensibility and dupe Pecola into killing the sick old dog. By passing himself off as a psychic, Soaphead assumes presence by playing "god," a role that permits him to

write an audacious "reasoned" letter to God explaining his conduct. Not realizing how he has violated Pecola by raping that part of her mind still intact after Cholly's assault, Soaphead falls into "ivory sleep," a phrase indicating both his love of creamy white skin and his ivory-towered escapist attitudes, that secluded place of selective understanding where he can divorce himself from reality and practical matters.

Pecola, having sought what Christian establishes as "reconciliation... salvation...rebirth" from the only spiritual source she knows, is last seen picking through the garbage heap on the edge of town (150). Living on the dark peripheries of her mind, she occupies physical space on the borders of town and is as unwanted and useless as the refuse she collects. Never having made it into the "major folds of the garment," she "spend[s] her days" acting out a grotesque impersonation of the archetypal symbol of spiritual freedom: "Elbows bent, hands on shoulders, she flailed her arms....Beating the air, a winged but grounded bird, intent on the blue void it could not reach -- could not even see -- but which filled the valleys of the mind" (18, 158). Pecola, absenced, silenced, and mad, raped in every sense, "is <u>somewhere</u> in that little brown house she and her mother moved to on the <u>edge</u> of town" (159, my emphasis). She inhabits psychologically disordered space in which the presence of mutually contradictory or antagonistic parts of her personality controls her behavior. Cholly's "touch" proves fatal, leaving her too remote from reality to be affected by the self-righteous judgement of her community and her mother. Claudia tells us that Cholly "loved her. I'm sure he did... but the love of a free man is never safe. There is no gift for the beloved" (159-160).

Not surprisingly, the intertextual truth of Claudia's statement resonates throughout the pages of the novel entitled Beloved, particularly as it applies to overstepping personal boundaries. As such, the invasion of space in Beloved also centers on the metaphor of the house as body. The very act of Morrison writing her fifth novel means that it will be shaped, to some degree, by her previous writing; hence, associations between these texts engender an elaborate and complex network regarding the meaning of freedom. Beloved begins with Paul D, eighteen years free of Sweet Home, entering Sethe's house (and body) only to desert her when, as Marsha Jean Darling explains, this "otherwise thoughtful and accepting [man]...judge[s] her actions as morally and ethically untenable, and her love for her children as 'too thick'" (Ties 4). Having roamed free for nearly two decades, knowing nothing of parental responsibility and commitment, Paul D freely judges Sethe's ability to mother. But by making this presumptuous assessment, Paul D sets himself up as the reasoned "man-in-control," encroaching upon that most private of space for Sethe, interior space where she has reconciled her actions with her very different idea of what freedom is: license to murder lovingly. "In a profound way," Darling says of Sethe, "mother's love, which is shared, committed and loyal, is a killer: it empowers itself to set the terms under which the life it has brought forth and nurtured will prevail" (Ties 4). Morrison concurs with Darling's assessment: "It's an excess of maternal feeling, a total surrender to that commitment" (Darling, Realms 6). In recognition of this "excess of maternal [love]," this arrogant freedom, the townspeople of Cincinnati turn against Sethe, a consequence she can endure. She cannot, however,

endure Paul D's renunciation because she believed that, with him, there would "be a little space...[to] [t]rust things and remember things...the last of the Sweet Home men was there to catch her if she sank (18). She believed, in other words, that Paul D's love was safe; instead, he forsakes her upon learning of Beloved's murder, and with Paul D gone, "[n]obody saw [her] falling" (174).

Although Paul D is not dangerously free in the way that Cholly is, his understanding of freedom so differs from Sethe's that it allows him to do what Cholly does: leave "the loved one...shorn, neutralized, frozen in the glare of the lover's inward eye" (BE 160). Deprived of her gift from the beloved, Sethe begins a downward spiral that ends when Paul D returns to find her under Baby Suggs's "quilt of merry colors," waiting for death as her mother-in-law had done (271). Early in the text, however, Paul D signals his different idea of freedom when he suggests that Sethe leave 124. Appalled, Sethe replies:

> I got a tree on my back and a haint in my house, and nothing in between but the daughter I am holding in my arms. No more running - from nothing. I will never run from another thing on this earth. I took one journey and I paid for the ticket, but let me tell you something, Paul D Garner: it cost too much! Do you hear me? (15)

Determined to never again run from danger or evil, Sethe remains fiercely commited to the only remaining family member still housed in the gray and white structure on Bluestone Road. To Sethe, this house is "no little thing -- a shirtwaist or a sewing basket you could walk off from or give away any old time" (22). Instead, the house represents both her decision to face danger and to act deliberately rather than to flee; it is, therefore, not a trifle, not an object whimsically discarded, but one

invested with value, substance, and importance. To let Paul D enter her house is to entrust him with its sanctity, just as she entrusts him with the sanctity of her body. Because Paul D does not understand the meaning of the house and the body housed, he freely invades the private space of Sethe's mind where she has, as Darling says, "[f]ree[d] [her]self to act and claim[ed] ownership and responsibility for [her] freed self (Ties 5). In contrast to Paul D's attitude, freedom is, paradoxically, commitment to Sethe, not flight from commitment,[5] and this philosphy explains why questioning the values and principles by which Sethe frees herself leaves her vulnerable to an even more invidious invasion of her mind, body, and spirit by Beloved, for it challenges her "intense[] loyal[ty] to her own sense of right action" (Darling, Ties 4).

Because, as Darling notes, "Sethe is inseparable from her children... those 'precious and fine and beautiful' parts of her which have displaced her self," Paul D's entry into 124 invites the invasion of Beloved, who, though physically separated by the boundaries between the living and the dead, is spiritually indivisible from Sethe (Ties 4). However angry, however confused Beloved is before Paul D's appearance, she is "aroused" and dangerous after it because he threatens to dispossess her, to appropriate her space within the house and within Sethe. Thus, Beloved gives Paul D notice of her displeasure by surrounding and immobilizing him in a "pool of red light" the moment he crosses the threshold of the house, a light Paul D correctly interprets as "evil," not "sad," as Sethe describes it (8). Alert to the danger but not constrained, Paul D begins to make love to Sethe, a display of affection Beloved will not abide, and as a second warning, she causes the house to pitch and shudder. Paul D's aggressive response, tearing up the house, asserts his control over it, action which leaves Beloved no alternative but to literally invade 124

since her ghostly presence is not strong enough to thwart him.

Once corporeal, however, her "devouring need for love" from Sethe, as Christina Davis defines Beloved's obsessive behavior, compromises Paul D's relationship with Sethe and, in turn, threatens to consume her mother and to deprive Denver of the loving sustenance she needs from both Sethe and Beloved (154). With Beloved's invasion of 124, the house becomes dangerous rather than oppressive space.

Ten years before Paul D arrives, Sethe and Denver hold a seance to call forth the "haint" and, by way of explanation, end their persecution. "[I]f she'd only come," Sethe says, "I could make [my reasons for murdering her] clear" (4). Beloved appears when it is necessary to defend her territory, but Sethe does not realize the dangers inherent in inviting a ghost into her life when she does not know its intent. Beloved, now "grown into a young woman with a baby's insatiable demands," as Walter Clemons explains, will use any means to procure Sethe's love and approving smile (74). Consequently, nothing is sacred to Beloved, not the private domain of another's mind which she can enter telepathically, not the sanctified space of the Clearing where Sethe goes for spiritual restoration after hearing of Halle's fate. Beloved will invade both with impunity. Futhermore, like Sethe, she will lovingly murder, but not to protect the loved one from a hellish existence, rather to satisfy a selfish and perverse need to completely possess the beloved. In the Clearing when Sethe gradually realizes that the pressure of Baby Suggs's imaginary fingers massaging her neck is increasing, that she is being strangled, she does not discern that Beloved, spurred by jealousy because Sethe's thoughts exclude her, is telepathically behind the attack. Once Beloved breaks Sethe's focus of thought, she rushes to her mother's aid, massages her neck, and kisses her under the chin so

passionately, so sensuously that Sethe is, at first transfixed, then shocked, and breaks away from Beloved's embrace. Yet unaware of who Beloved is, Sethe reasons that "[a]fter Paul D beat [the haint] out of the house...it collected itself in the Clearing," and she dismisses the attack as a "tiny disturbance" (99). The dramatic irony of this situation reveals the danger Beloved poses to Sethe, who has no idea that Beloved's presence is all-invasive and life threatening.

Whereas Sethe dismisses the incident in the Clearing, Beloved believes that this intimate moment has demonstrated the very personal and private nature of her love for her mother. When Beloved returns to the house, then, and hears "[b]reathing and murmuring, breathing and murmuring" as Sethe and Paul D make love under the stairs, she comes near to tears (100). Beloved knows that, even though "[s]he had been so close, then closer" to her mother in the Clearing, she will never be as "close" to Sethe as Paul D is at this moment (100). Angered because her time with Sethe "was being reduced...by...Him mostly...Him who kept her hidden at night behind doors," Beloved leaves the house and, seeing a cardinal, becomes "hungry" for every glimpse of the "blood spot" in the leaves -- another of Morrison's symbolic references to the color red (101). Obviously "out for blood," Beloved formulates a plan when she becomes enthralled by the sight of turtles copulating by the stream, their necks embraced. Forgetful of all else, she "drop[s] the folds of her skirt...[its] hem darken[ing] in the water," as her darkening thoughts devise a scheme to prevent Paul D from being "close" to Sethe (105). She will transgress the bounds of propriety and become Paul D's surrogate lover.

Hence, when Paul D moves from Sethe's bed to the rocker, the keeping room, the storeroom, and finally, the cold room where he is physically

"separated from the main part of 124," that is, in space Beloved controls, initially, he does not know that he is not acting on his own volition (116). Rather, Paul D thinks that he is reacting to "house-fits, the glassy anger men sometimes feel when a woman's house begins to bind them, when they want to yell and break something or at least run off...[but] in this house-fit there was no anger, no suffocation, no yearning to be elsewhere" (115). Since he has, as yet, no desire to "run off," Paul D determines that he "was being prevented" from staying in the house, that Beloved dislodged him (116). He knows, moreover, that Beloved's plan extends beyond his mere removal from 124. "So he waited.... She came" (116). And Paul D is devoid of the resources or authority to act other than according to Beloved's desires; she compels him, while "turn[ing] her head over her shoulder the way the turtles had," to enter her body, "to touch [her] on the inside part and call [her by] name" (116). Beloved not only intends to satisfy her sexual desire by physically possessing Paul D, she also means to possess him spiritually, through the same act, by making him feel nauseous and repulsed at the thought of sexual intercourse with Sethe. To completely possess him, Beloved insists that he call her by name, for it forces him to acknowledge her, to "know" her both sexually and psychologically as she "knows" him. In an effort to resist Beloved, Paul D refuses to look at her, so as not to weaken "like Lot's wife [or feel] some womanish need to see the nature of the sin behind him; feel a sympathy, perhaps, for the cursing cursed, or want to hold it in his arms out of respect for the connection between them" (117). Once Paul D yields to his "womanish" desire and looks at Beloved, he sinks his pride and approaches his terrifying seductress. And, ironically, by loving "sin" to the exact degree that he hates it, by reaching an equilibruim between condemnation

and mercy, Paul D feels the rust flake off "the seams of his tobacco tin" (117). His red heart beats again; his manly stoicism dissolves. Nevertheless, however unintentionally Beloved unlocks Paul D's heart, he remains powerless to break her bewitching hold on him. Only Sethe's unconditional acceptance of Paul D when she invites him back to her bed breaks Beloved's spell. The "warmth of Sethe's smile" renders Beloved's invasive power "harmless" (131).

Though Sethe quite innocently saves Paul D from his unholy alliance with Beloved, she cannot free Denver or Beloved from fear of dissolution of the body, an invasive fear symptomatic of their traumatized lives. Denver, both lonely and insular, stands outside the protective radiance of her mother's smile and is, therefore, even more vulnerable to Beloved's caprice than Paul D. Denver knows about Beloved's sexual arrangement with Paul D, and she has seen Beloved strangle Sethe. Beloved must, then, keep Denver's allegiance by playing on her greatest fear: that Beloved will return to the spiritual world. What begins as a game of "Come find me" in the darkness of the cold room turns into psychological blackmail, its unspoken text scripted through implication. At first unaware of Beloved's intent, Denver, laughing but wary when she "trips and falls down onto [Paul D's] pallet," tells Beloved to "[s]top fooling" (122). She becomes mildly "accusatory" but "doesn't want to offend [Beloved]...or betray the panic that is creeping over her like hairs" (122). When Denver sees that Beloved is gone,

> [t]he loss is ungovernable. She [begins]...mov[ing] rapidly around, reaching, touching cobwebs, cheese, slanting shelves, the pallet...she does not know where her body stops, which part of her is an arm, a foot or a knee....It is hard to breathe... she is crying. Just as she thought it might happen, it has.

> Easy as walking into a room. A magical appearance on a stump... and a magical disappearance in a shed, eaten alive by the dark. "Don't," she is saying...."Don't. Don't go back."
>
> This is worse than when Paul D came to 124....Now she is crying because she has no self. Death is a skipped meal compared to this. She can feel her thickness thinning, dissolving into nothing. She grabs the hair at her temples...to halt the melting....She doesn't move to open the door...there is no world out there. (122)

Unlike Pecola, who desperately wishes to escape her body as a survival tactic, Denver is sickened by fear that her body will dissolve into the darkness. Pecola barely survives abuse by dissociating herself from her body, whereas Denver gets through her trauma by grabbing her hair as a means of holding her body intact. Denver secretly takes a piece of Beloved's dress and "holds on" in order to maintain a grasp on reality when her sister reappears, laughing (122). Having pushed Denver to the edge of a mental breakdown, Beloved now has control of her psychologically, control so coercive that only actual disintegration of the body from starvation can force Denver off the porch into the "world out there" to seek help from the community.

Yet, the terror that Denver experiences in the cold room is a terror Beloved knows herself. Beloved's loss of a tooth immediately following Sethe's and Paul D's sexual reunion, a metaphor recalling Pauline's and Cholly's dissolution, triggers an intense fear that her body will disintegrate, break into pieces, explode, or be swallowed:

> Beloved looked at the tooth and thought, This is it. Next would be her arm, her hand, a toe. Pieces of her would drop maybe one at a time, maybe all at once. Or on one of those

> mornings before Denver woke and after Sethe left she would fly apart. It is difficult keeping her head on her neck, her legs attached to her hips when she is by herself. Among the things she could not remember was when she first knew that she could wake up any day and find herself in pieces. She had two dreams: exploding and being swallowed. When her tooth came out -- an odd fragment, last in the row -- she thought it was starting....Sitting there holding a small white tooth in the palm of her smooth smooth hand [Beloved cried]. Cried the way she wanted to when turtles came out of the water...right after the blood-red bird disappeared back into the leaves. The way she wanted to when Sethe went to him standing in the tub under the stairs. With the tip of her tongue she touched the salt water that slid to the corner of her mouth and hoped Denver's arm around her shoulders would keep them from falling apart. (133-134)

Fear of her body breaking down, as well as fear that she is unloved when she fails to effect disunion between Sethe and Paul D, provokes Beloved's emotional disintegration. But the underlying causes of her psychic stress are the fact of her murder at age two and the ephemeral nature of her present being. Because she is a disembodied soul, her fleshly body is in constant danger of vanishing. That she depends on Denver to hold her together after willfully playing upon Denver's incapacitating fear of her own body dissolving reveals a spiteful, shameless, and treacherous side of her nature that surfaces again once Paul D leaves.

Without Paul D to act as a ballast, the now pregnant Beloved freely challenges and makes impossible demands on Sethe until her mother is fired from her job and, alternately supplicating herself to, and

defending herself from, her daughter's voracious attacks, wastes away to a husk. Originally perceived by Paul D as sycophantic (a hanger-on having no place else to go), Beloved becomes more and more saprophytic, attaching herself to Sethe, as if obtaining nourishment from her, then growing osmotically larger in her pregnancy as Sethe shrinks, breaks down and edges toward madness (65). Sethe is no longer simply "licked, tasted, eaten by Beloved's eyes"; rather, she is incorporated into the house of Beloved's pregnant body (55). Pregnancy emerges as a metaphor for Beloved's morbid growth as she develops into a diabolic predator, invading and sapping the life-blood from her mother.

The cryptic message concealed in what Deborah Horvitz calls the "remembered ghost story" explains the origins of Beloved's saprophytic relationship encoded within the metaphor of pregnancy (162). Eight pages of fragmented text, some unpunctuated, some lacking capitalization, some merely phrases casting an explicit image, some reading like poetry or a series of calls and responses, and ending with the mournful song-like refrain, "You are mine/You are mine/You are mine," communicates the deadly passage across the Atlantic to America (217). Like the third passage from the primer material in The Bluest Eye, this section reveals the dissolution of the self in unbearable space; yet, it is, as Horvitz points out, "fluid, open, created in the first person with no names and no reference to time or place" (162). But unlike the primer passage with its words run together, its explicit references pointing to specific space, and its third person point of view revealing omniscient objectivity (all of which show Pecola's inability to escape her confines), this ghost story, "break[s] the barriers of form...," Horvitz writes, "[in the same way that the] ghost mov[es] beyond human barriers" (162). In an interview with Marsha Jean Darling, Morrison explains why

Beloved is able to cross the boundary between the carnate and incarnate worlds and why she is both Sethe's daughter and Sethe's mother. Morrison says that "[t]he gap between Africa and Afro-America and the gap between the living and the dead and the gap between the past and the present does not exist (Realms 5). And though Beloved embodies specific members of Sethe's family, she personifies, Horvitz reasons, "every African woman whose story will never be told...all Black women in America trying to trace their ancestry back to the mother on the ship attached to them.... This inter-generational, inter-continental, female ghost-child...[is a] conflated or combined identity...[of] generations of mothers and daughters hunted down and stolen from Africa (157, 158). As such, her voice is both specific and polyphonic.

To be hunted down and stolen from one's homeland; to have only room enough to crouch in the rat-infested hold of a slaveship; to be too hungry to eat, too thirsty to cry; to have "men without skin" urinate on you and stick their fingers in you, saying "beloved in the dark and bitch in the light"; to have your mother jump overboard without saying a word, without smiling, waving goodbye, or even looking at you is to suffer such degradating invasion of mind, body, and spirit, is to live such a baleful existence that, in death, the collective ancestral voice screams, "I am not dead I am not there is a house" (210, 241). In this voice, generations of female spirits refuse to acknowledge the finality of death because they have been robbed of life, particularly of the life-sustaining role of mother. These spirits still mourn this loss, as do their daughters, who long

> for the join I am loving my face so much my dark face is close to me I want to join she whispers to me I reach for her chewing and swallowing she touches me she knows

I want to join she chews and swallows me I am gone now I am her face my own face has left me I see me swim away a hot thing I see the bottoms of my feet I am alone I want to be the two of us I want the join (213)

Beloved, as Sethe's mother, hopes to effect union by being chewed and swallowed by her own mother; as Sethe's daughter, she attempts fusion by "feed[ing] and fatten[ing]" off Sethe,[6] to use Horvitz's words (160). The need is so intense that it does not dissipate through generations of ancestral spirits: Sethe's mother tells Beloved "there is a house," and 124 acquires another level of meaning as the "house of lost mothers," the structure that represents the ruptured mother-daughter bond in a system earnestly dependent on that rupture. Beloved, having been directed to the house, must go to claim her mother.

Once pregnant, Beloved will not permit the loss of another link in the matrilineal line. She will ingest her mother because, in this act of possession Sethe becomes an innate part of Beloved and her unborn child. In this complicated logic, possession is the operative word since, as Horvitz makes clear, it is a necessary by-product of the master-slave relationship (161). Being a possession ultimately makes one possessive. Moreover, possession necessitates invasion; to have and hold as property means that all personal boundaries can be transgressed, that the possessed can claim no physical space as her own. In the southern American construction of an ideology based on ownership of people captured for the purpose of slavery, respect and dignity for those people was abrogated. Once the possessor achieves this abrogation, he is free to enact any type of invasion he chooses. He can stick his fingers in Sethe's mother, he can take "measure" Sethe's body, he can take her milk, he can whip a "tree" onto her back, he can burn Sixo alive, he can

imprison Ella in a house and repeatedly rape her. In his arrogance, he believes, as schoolteacher does, that he can "come in [Baby Suggs's] yard" to recapture Sethe (179). But "to come in" a freed slave's yard is to execute a serious invasion, one that Baby Suggs's clearly sees as a personal intrusion akin to rape because "yard," as an appendage of "house," is the house as body. Sethe will not permit an invasion of this dimension. She hears wings (symbolic of freedom) and flys to "protect" her children. Only when one thinks of the magnitude of this invasion of the African people who were robbed, despoiled, and taken by force, can one grasp the significance of the remembered ghost story, understand Sethe's reason for slitting Beloved's throat, or recognize the nature of Beloved's need. Morrison dedicates the book to "Sixty million and more." She means those who died as a direct result of the invasion of the African continent, that is, in the attempt to capture them, in the stockades, and in the holds of the ships before they reached the shores of America.

These outrageous violations and those imposed on successive generations of enslaved Americans are what Sethe, as the manifestation of all the Sethes before her, protests when she runs to the shed to kill her children. Consequently, Bodwin, an apparition of schoolteacher who, eighteen years earlier "[came] into her yard...[came] for her best thing," faces Sethe's" ice pick...hand" when he comes to pick up Denver (262). Beloved, left standing alone on the porch,

> feels the emptiness in the hand Sethe has been holding. Now [Sethe] is running into the faces of the people out there, joining them and leaving Beloved behind. Alone. Again. Then Denver, running too. Away from her to the pile of people out there. They make an ant hill. A hill of black people,

> falling. And above them all, rising from his place with a whip in his hand, the man without skin, looking. He is looking at her. (262)

A multitude of images interspersed throughout the text comes together here to express the unspeakable depth of Beloved's despair. The empty space Beloved feels without Sethe's hand in hers is the empty inner space Sethe's mother experiences when her mother jumps overboard. The perception that Sethe "joins" the crowd of thirty women reflects Sethe's mother's desire to join the underwater face of the woman in the sea. The ant hill is the pile of dead bodies about to be pushed into the sea that Sethe's mother remembers on the deck of the slaveship. Bodwin is, as Horvitz points out, "the slave-driver from the slave ship" (166). His "look" is the gaze of the bluest eye, the gaze of one-eyed white god, phallic and threatening in its purpose.

One look from this "man without skin" is enough to cause Beloved to explode, to disappear, to transform into a fish-haired woman who runs back to the stream, back to the underwater loneliness invisioned in the remembered ghost story. Her anxiety about her body breaking apart proves valid; her fleshly body dissolves. In her striking analysis of Beloved's disintegration, Horvitz sees

> [t]he American and African Beloveds join forever...as symbols of the past -- exploding, swallowing, and chewing -- and fuse with these same images in the present. The sickening fear of her body exploding, dissolving, or being chewed up and spit out links each enslaved Beloved with her sister in captivity....The Beloved from [Africa, the Middle Passage, and 124] is another's matrilineal heritage and future; and each Beloved merges with her other 'selves' in the shared and horrific fear of losing

> her body. The gap is bridged between America and Africa, the past and the present, the dead and the living, the flesh and the spirit. But they are joined in a specific shared, secret horror, perhaps the most devastating effect of the violence heaped upon them by "men without skin." Each lives in terror that her body will disintegrate or, quite literally, explode. (164)

Clearly, Beloved's fear of losing her body is the same fear Denver experiences in the cold room; it is an "inherited" fear, symbolic of internally invaded space, passed through the generations of Sethes, who "didn't know where the world stopped and she began," who question whether "the parts [will] hold" (164, 272).

Morrison ends the text with an image of the homeless, immaterial Beloved holding herself together to contain her loneliness: "Arms crossed, knees drawn up; holding, holding on, this motion, unlike a ship's, smooths and contains the rocker. It's an inside kind -- wrapped tight as skin" (274). Yet, Beloved's lonely spirit also "roams. No rocking can hold it down. It is alive, on its own. A dry spreading thing that makes the sound of one's own feet going seem to come from a far-off place" (274). This Beloved lives in the rustle of a skirt, in the brush of a cheek during sleep, in the photographs of friends and relatives; only now the inhabitants of 124 do not invite Beloved's invasion "because they know things will never be the same if they do" (275). "Remembering seemed unwise" because, as Morrison explains,

> ...it was not possible to survive on certain levels and dwell on it. People who did dwell on it, it probably killed them, and the people who did not dwell on it probably went forward. They tried to make a life...

> There is a necessity for remembering the horror, but of course there's a necessity for remembering it in a manner in which it can be digested, in a manner in which the memory is not destructive. (Beloved 274, Darling, Realms 5)

In the closing words of the novel, the voices of the "disremembered" and "unaccounted for" return to Africa, "the place where the long grass opens, [the place where] the girl who waited to be loved and cry shame erupts into her separate parts,...makes it easy for the chewing laughter to swallow her away" 9274). "[F]ear," Horvitz says,

> predates [Beloved's] birth; it comes from the Beloveds in Africa and the ship...[who] repeatedly hear 'chewing and swallowing and laughter'. The point is that enslaved women, not in possession of their own bodies, survived barbaric beatings, rapes, and being "swallowed" without total decomposition by emotionally dissociating themselves from their bodies. The price they paid was...emormous...; those that survived often did so with no shred of basic integrity or dignity regarding their bodies. The imagery emphasizes those African women who did not survive the Middle Passage -- those who were chewed up, spit out, and swallowed by the sea -- those whose bodies and stories were never recovered. Morrison, speaking of the women whose stories were lost, says they are 'disremembered'... meaning not only that they are forgotten but also that they are dismembered, cut up and off, and not re-membered. (165)

Morrison aims to recover these disremembered souls in her novel by casting an unwavering critical eye at the attitudes of the American slaveholder. Stamp Paid, remembering the unlivable lifes of slaves

observes that

> [w]hitepeople believed that whatever the manners, under every dark skin was a jungle. Swift unnavigable waters, swinging screaming baboons, sleeping snakes, red gums ready for the sweet white blood....But it wasn't the jungle blacks brought with them to this place from the other (livable) place. It was the jungle whitefolks planted in them. And it grew. It spread. In, through and after life, it spread, until it invaded the whites who had made it. Touched every one. Changed and altered them. Made them bloody, silly, worse than even they wanted to be, so scared were they of the jungle they had made. The screaming baboon lived under their own white skin; the red gums were their own. (199)

Throughout the text, the red-gummed, screaming baboons, the "men without skin," lurk on the peripheries of each page. To look into their own hearts of darkness would be to face a vision they could not bear. Better to demonize the Other as the savage who defiles the white sanctuary. Finding "a red[7] ribbon knotted around a curl of wet, woolly hair, clinging still to its bit of scalp" on his flatbed, Stamp Paid moans, "What <u>are</u> these people? You tell me, Jesus. What <u>are</u> these people?" (180). Stamp Paid reiterates, here, the real effect of slavery: the invader's demonization of themselves.

Notes

1. The biblical Samson was emasculated by Delilah, whose name, according to Barbara Walker, is a compound of "De(daleth), the Yonic Door, and lilu, the lotus, another yonic symbol" meaning "She Who Makes Weak." Barbara Walker, The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets (San Francisco: Harper, 1983) 217. Samson Fuller obviously feels weakened by female procreative power: after impregnating Cholly's mother, he runs. The surname "Fuller" implies that Cholly's father possesses all the distinguishing qualities required to "fuck up" Cholly ("full" of those qualities), that he lacks restraint, checks or qualifications ("fully" capable of responding to his son in this manner).

2. See chapter 3 in Barbara Christian, Black Feminist Criticism: Perspectives on Black Women Writers (New York: Pergamon, 1985) 71-80 for a discussion of "class" in Morrison's first four novels.

3. Besides Miner's article, see Cynthia A. Davis, "Self, Society, and Myth in Toni Morrison's Fiction," Contemporary Literature 23 (1982): 323-41 for a discussion of "The Look" in The Bluest Eye.

4. Elliot Butlar-Evans points out that the towns women like Geraldine come from (Mobile, Aiken, Newport News, Marietta, Meridian) are "southern or borderline provincial towns, not quite rural yet not quite urban, in which certain constraints are imposed on social conduct, particularly that of women." His comment explains Morrison's choice of towns as an indicator of Geraldine's character. Elliott Butlar-Evans, Race, Gender and Desire: Narrative Strategies in the Fiction of Toni Cade Bambara, Toni Morrison and Alice Walker (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1989) 70.

5. Sethe's sons also seek freedom through flight, a choice women do not have since the "open road" is a far more dangerous place for them than it is for a man. The threat of rape and death is ever-present. Thus, women are socially restricted and confined to the home, a phenomenon that influences their commitment to it.

6. This imagery recalls Pecola's belief in transfiguration through chewing and swallowing Mary Janes.

7. Again, Morrison uses "red" symbolically, here, to show "what it means to know color as a matter of life and death," as Ann-Janine Morey notes. Ann-Janine Morey, "Toni Morrison and the Color of Life," Christian Century 105 (1988): 1042.

Chapter III

Soul Space

> Win war. Rise bloody, maybe not too late
> For having first to civilize a space
> Wherein to play your violin with grace.
> Gwendolyn Brooks, "First Fight. Then Fiddle"

If one were to imagine musical accompaniments for the novels examined in this thesis, they would not be symphonic arrangements played by graceful violins but, rather, soulful blues ballads like Ethel Waters' "What Did I Do To Be So Black And Blue" to complement The Bluest Eye or Billie Holiday's "Strange Fruit" to complement Beloved; in these texts, the conditions conducive for acquiring civilized space rarely occur. Because the black experience differs historically and currently from that of the white race, Gaston Bachelard's distinctly romantic term "felicitous space," seems ill-suited to define space seized by the black imagination. More apropos is the term "soul space" since it incorporates the essence of black culture (soul) and indicates space where "unself-consciously, naturally, and jubilantly," to use Elizabeth Schultz's phrase, Afro-Americans celebrate themselves (269). While occupying soul space, as Schultz points out in her article on Al Young's Who Is Angelina?, characters are "deeply rooted in [themselves]," that is, free, centered, and self-knowledgeable (265). Unlike Baby Suggs, who does not have a "map" of herself with which to dispel the "sadness at the center... where the self that was no self made its home," a character tenanting

soul space "go[es] inside," as Paul D urges Sethe to do, in order to give the self a home (BEL 140, 46). Few of Morrison's characters, however, experience soul space for sustained periods; more commonly, they know soul space as a brief moment in time, too often truncated by a self-interested majority that benefits from keeping Afro-Americans positioned on the perimeter of society where they are easily controlled and identified as inferior.

The Breedloves, for example, are essentially doomed, incapable of taking their destiny into their own hands. Pauline has "never felt at home anywhere, or that she belonged anywhere" (88). At fifteen, she longs for a rescuing "Presence," a man who will provide the mythical fairytale home and its concomitant enchanted space (90). After Pauline marries Cholly, orgasm is as close as she comes to experiencing soul space since it frees her imagination enough to allow her to equate sexual climax with the colors of the rainbow. Cholly's psychological growth is permanently stunted in adolescence, leaving him without the inner resources needed for self-affirmation, a creative act in which one chooses his or her responsibilities. "Dangerous" freedom is not an alternative choice for Cholly; it is the only choice available to a hollow man. Pecola fleetingly experiences soul space when she walks to Mr. Yacobowski's store and recognizes the nature of soul space when she visits the whores above her apartment, but she is, in effect, "that dead girl...on the street or the bus, [that] nobody wrote about," as Morrison says in a conversation with Gloria Naylor (576). Like her parents, Pecola is in need of "soul," that is, the ability to affirm one's self within one's environment.

Ironically, the characters in The Bluest Eye who acquire a modicum of soul space, who, to varying degrees, remain untouched by the dominant

culture, are the whores, China, Poland, and Maginot Line, and elderly women like Aunt Jimmy's friends Miss Alice and Mrs. Gaines. Considered unworthy and, thereby, no threat to the status quo, both groups are stationed on the outer extremities of society by virtue of profession or age, a location that proffers, as Butlar-Evans argues, "absolute economic and sexual autonomy" (69). Because the whores value economic and moral independence, they are free to define themselves within space they claim as their own, whereas Miss Alice and Mrs. Gaines redefine themselves in old age, a condition that liberates them from economic responsibility and sexual desire.

The metaphoric underpinnings apparent in the whores' names, which represent spaces invaded during World War II, comment more on the "johns" and on the nation which has created and, at times, invaded their bodies than on the "colonized" whores, whose attitude to their profession leaves the core of their being unsullied. Morrison's characterizations of these women stresses, as Butlar-Evans comments, "women's independence and empowerment" (70). They are not stereotypical caricatures, that is, luckless victims of fate who could, with the "right man," become model wives. Nor are they big-hearted, humble prostitutes or "sloppy, inadequate whores" dependent on drugs and pimps because of dissolute childhood experiences (47). "They were," as the narrator bluntly states, "not young girls in whores' clothing...[t]hey were whores in whores' clothing, whores who had never been young and had no word for innocence" (48). They harbor no delusions about their occupation or about the men who patronize them, all of whom they hate "without shame, apology, or discrimination," all of whom they see as weak and inadequate (47). This clear-eyed honesty regarding themselves and their clients accounts for their unqualified respect for "'good Christian colored women,'" women

without vices, women devoted to their families, women whose husbands sleep with the whores who, in turn, "take their money, but always with a vengence" (48). Having dispensed with guilt and remorse, these women concentrate on state of mind; accordingly, their apartment resonates with all the stimulating features the Breedloves' apartment lacks: singing, teasing, laughter, sexual banter, and "breezy and rough" storytelling (48). They are as free with Pecola as they are with each other, so free, Pecola wonders if they are "real," a silent query answered by Maginot Line's "soft[], purring[], loving[]" belch (48). These women "inscribed in the text as one aspect of 'the real' community," as Butlar-Evans says, make the space they occupy "soul space" rather than search out space for its intrinsic value (69).

Of these three women, Morrison focuses on Maginot Line, an uninhibited woman whose laughter comes "from deep inside her...like the sound of many rivers, freely, deeply, muddily heading for the room of an open sea" (45). Her laughter, like her soul, is immense, expansive, capable of encompassing the ocean's breadth. On her dilapidated second-story porch, she lies in a rocking chair, a "mountain of flesh," shoeless, poking her feet between the rails, her "massive legs like tree stumps parted wide at the knees, over which spread two roads of soft flabby inner thigh that kissed each other deep in the shade of her dress and closed" (82). Like China and Poland, Maginot Line accepts her body and blackness openly, joyously. More important than outward appearance is essential value, both in herself and in her "space" where "being [exists] within limits that protect" (Bachelard xxxii). Both self-contained and self-directing, Maginot Line will not abide insults, as Claudia and Frieda discover when they repeat the term "ruined woman" that their mother uses to describe Maginot Line. In response, Maginot Line

"gracefully" throws her root beer bottle at the girls, its shards of glass dappling their legs, then laughs as they run away. She is, after all, "the Maginot Line," thought to be impregnable and about which it was said, "[N]othing can break through such lines, on ne passe pas à travers de telles lignes" (Rowe 42). Yet, Maginot Line lovingly bestows presence on Pecola by answering her questions, however obliquely, and calling her "chittlin," "dumpin," "chicken," puddin," or "honey," epithets indicative of a lusty appetite for sensual pleasure, for life itself. For Maginot Line, what counts in herself and others is, to borrow Schultz's phrase, " the color of one's soul - one's capacity for compassion, for generosity, for wonder" (273).

During Naylor's conversation with Morrison the topic turns to women's admiration for other women, and both Naylor and Morrison agree that "[those] who have turned their back on the world...[those] who have been selfish to some degree" induce this response (572). Though Naylor and Morrison speak in general terms about admirable women, their conversation sheds light on Morrison's characterization of the whores. In the manner of admirable women, the whores are "original," a quality that authenticates and makes it "very clear in some deep way...what her womanhood is (Naylor 572). Similarly, Miss Alice and Mrs. Gaines express these qualities in old age because, as younger women, they of necessity surrendered to society's version of their role as servants to everyone but black children and black women -- even though these two women ran white people's houses and knew it. Butlar-Evans observes that "Aunt Jenny's [sic] peers, largely a reproduction of Hurston's characterization of Black women as 'mules of de world,' eloquently address the complexities of Black women's existence" (70). Negotiating these complexities has been a major part of Miss Alice's and Mrs. Gaines'

successful journey through life. In old age, they find "relief":

> [T]hey wrapped their heads in rags, and their breasts in flannel; eased their feet in felt. They were through with lust and lactation, beyond tears and terror. They alone could walk the roads of Mississippi, the lanes of Georgia, the fields of Alabama unmolested. They were old enough to be irritable when and where they chose, tired enough to look forward to death, disinterested enough to accept the idea of pain while ignoring the presence of pain. They were, in fact, at last, free. (110)

Entering space where they are released from the demands of employers and family, from sexuality and femininity, Miss Alice and Mrs. Gaines affirm the self. Comfort takes priority; fears of sexual molestation subside. They can move about in open space because they are no longer desirable -- nor do they desire anything but to simply "be." In old age, Miss Alice and Mrs. Gaines "join the infinity of time with the finite nature of self, create from the feeling of total release, their own soul space," to borrow another of Schultz's phrases (282).

This juncture where the infinity of time meets the finite nature of the self is what centers Sixo, what defines him as "man" since "self" implies a center. The convergence of time with self for Sixo means speaking his African language and preforming private rituals among the trees at night to "keep his bloodlines open," space where he presumably envisions a different cosmos (25). Because Sixo sees "place" as space where energy is encoded in matter, both the trees on Sweet Home and the "Redmen's" deserted stone structure contain a conscious spirit; thus, Sixo "asks permission" from the "Redmen's" spirits to bring Thirty-Mile Woman there and relies on "nature's" help to find her when she becomes lost. Sure of his manhood, sure of the color of his soul and of the

promise of new life forming in Thirty-Mile Woman's womb, Sixo sings as he faces death because his deeply rooted interior life promises assurance of his soul's restoration in a new spiritual plane.

While at Sweet Home, Baby Suggs lacks the interior life that Sixo manages to retain. Once across the Ohio River, however, her heart starts beating, and within her own home, the keeping room or parlor holds particular significance as the room that fosters comfortable seclusion while containing and emitting Baby Suggs' spiritual presence and generosity. Operating as both formal and private space, the keeping room is where Baby Suggs takes Sethe to bathe her when she arrives at 124 and where she is reunited with her other children. Twenty-eight days later, Baby Suggs carries Beloved's body to the keeping room, and when Beloved returns in the flesh, she gains strength by concentrating on the same two squares of "wild" orange color in the quilt, "like life in the raw," that Baby Suggs contemplates when she retreats to die in this room where "thrift and modesty" accounts for its dark, muted colors (38). Over the years, Baby Suggs tells Denver "things" in the keeping room: how Halle bought her freedom, why Denver leads a "charmed" life, that the ghost would not harm her because she had "tasted its blood" (209). Sethe prays or "think-talks," after Baby Suggs dies, in the seclusion of the keeping room because Baby Suggs "whispers" to her and "keeps her going [by] help[ing] her endure the chastising ghost, [by] refurbish[ing] the baby faces of Howard and Buglar..., [by keeping] her husband shadowy but there" (88). When Sethe resigns herself to death, she, too, retreats to the keeping room.

The keeping room, as the spiritual center of the house, provides privacy, intimacy, and solitude for Baby Suggs' family. For Baby Suggs' "people," the Clearing serves a similar function because, as a

natural site, it connects them to a greater power and allows a "primitive" connection between flesh and spirit. In this "green blessed place...misty with plant stem and the decay of berries," matter emits a spiritual essence that helps one along one's journey, a value as essential to Baby Suggs' religious philosophy as it is to Sixo's (89). For "Baby Suggs, holy...an unchurched preacher," and her followers, this "wide-open space cut deep in the woods...at the end of a...bright green corridor of oak and chestnut...known only to deer and whoever cleared the land in the first place," liberates imaginative powers (86, 90, 87, 89). There Baby Suggs utters her "powerful Call" and tells her people that "the only grace they could have was the grace they could imagine. That if they could not see it, they would not have it" (177, 88). As Ann-Janine Morey says, Baby Suggs brings together "[t]he holiness of the body and the power of speech...[when she] calls her people to love themselves by speaking in love [about] each part of the battered body (1040):

> Here,...in this place, we flesh; flesh that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in grass. Love it. Love it hard. Yonder they do not love your flesh. They despise it... love your hands! Love them. Raise them up and kiss them. Touch others with them, pat them together, stroke them on your face 'cause they don't love that either. <u>You</u> got to love it, <u>you</u>! And no, they ain't in love with your mouth....<u>You</u> got to love it. This is the flesh I'm talking about here. Flesh that needs to be loved. Feet that need to rest and to dance; backs that need support; shoulders that need strong arms....More than eyes and feet....More than your life-holding womb and your life-giving private parts, hear em now, love your heart. For this is the prize. (88-89)

In her analysis of this passage, Morey points out that through speech Baby Suggs effects a physical resurrection because Baby believes that "word and flesh, body and soul, belong together" (1040). After Beloved's murder, Baby Suggs no longer affirms the physical loving body because, Morey asserts, "there is no word, words or Word that can free her from the evil of racism" (1040). Baby Suggs refuses to go to the Clearing believing "they had won":

> Her authority in the pulpit, her dance in the Clearing, her powerful Call...had been mocked and rebuked by the blood spill in her backyard....There was no grace -- imaginary or real -- and no sunlit dance in a Clearing could change that. Her faith, her love, her imagination and her great big old heart began to collapse twenty-eight days after her daughter-in-law arrived. (177, 89)

White laws prevent Baby Suggs' burial in the Clearing; instead, she lies beside Beloved in the community graveyard, space Stamp Paid thinks she would not approve of. Baby Suggs' space in the Clearing is appropriated for "big-city revivals," and though its purpose changes, its essence remains the same for Sethe, who in the sanctity of its solitude listens for "clues" from Baby Suggs and "to the spaces that the long-ago singing had left behind" (89). Like Sixo, Baby Suggs survives as a spiritual presence, living on the borders of the main character's minds as "rememory." The soul space Sixo and Baby Suggs knew also survives in rememory, not as a hopeful symbol of the future but as a reminder of the past before calamitous events made preserving soul space impossible.

As The Bluest Eye and Beloved move toward closure, the implicit meaning in their subtexts indicates that soul space does, in fact, exist, at least as a future possibility. Despite "[a]ll adults, including their

parents, see[ing Claudia and Frieda] as two little black girls, as two little objects," as Marco Portales concludes, the MacTeers instill in their children values necessary for developing the kind of interior life essential for acquiring soul space (496). Mr. MacTeer, for example, guards the house from the ravages of winter just as he guards his daughters from the prurient advances of Mr. Henry and, thereby, demonstrates regard for his children's welfare, an act that fosters self-regard in Claudia and Frieda. To Claudia, her father is protector, a "wolfkiller turned hawk hunter" and provider, "Vulcan guarding the flames" (52). Labouring over his forge like the mythological deity, Mr. MacTeer earnestly teaches Claudia and Frieda about the intricacies of heating their drafty house with coal -- when to open and close various vents, which grades of coal to use, how to rake, feed, and bank the fire. His Vulcan-like industry and creativity in utilitarian matters impress upon Claudia the values of the master artisan, the divine smith in all things, a skill she hones for herself as storyteller.

From Claudia's childhood perspective, her parents, harried by adult responsibilities, only give "orders" (12). From what she perceives as adult's unsympathetic, guilt-inducing vision of a child's place in their world, Claudia and Frieda create ways to insulate themselves from the coercive power of adults by taking a watchful, resistive position:

> We had defended ourselves since memory against everything and everybody, considered all speech a code to be broken by us, all gestures subject to careful analysis; we had become headstrong, devious and arrogant. Nobody paid us any attention, so we paid very good attention to ourselves. Our limitations were not known to us -- not then. Our only handicap was our size; people gave us orders because they were bigger and stronger"

(149).

By the novel's end, Claudia learns something of her limitations; she discovers that confidence alone is not enough to ensure the birth of Pecola's baby after she and Frieda, in an act of sympathic magic, plant marigold seeds, which never sprout. But in her defensive actions, she learns how to adapt, how to garner strength out of childish "pity and pride" and gains maturity (149). The introspective adult Claudia later re-evaluates her childhood perceptions and realizes that her childhood suffering was

> a productive and fructifying pain. Love, thick and dark as Alaga syrup, eased up into that cracked window....It stuck...to the frosted windowpanes. It coated my chest, along with the salve, and when the flannel came undone in my sleep, the clear, sharp curves of air outlined its presence on my throat. And in the night, when my coughing was dry and tough, feet padded into the room, hands repinned the flannel, readjusted the quilt, and rested a moment on my forehead. So when I think of autumn, I think of somebody with hands who does not want me to die. (14)

Claudia develops into a philosophic, perceptive adult, rooted in a past that informs the present, qualities essential to a person with "soul." Recognizing, as Barbara Christian says, that "[t]hey had all raped [Pecola]," Claudia knows that even though it is "much, much, much too late," she need not perpetuate the attitudes of her community in her own life (Black Women 151, BE 160). As an adult, she may, indeed, seek out and find soul space.

Before Beloved's appearance, Denver values the privacy and solitude provided by her "emerald closet" hidden in the woods, where the interconnectedness between space and the female imagination works to

transform her desperate loneliness into creative reverie (104). Denver discovers the correlation between physical and spiritual space that Sixo and Baby Suggs esteem and recognizes that a change in space effects a change in identity. "Veiled and protected by the live green walls" of her bower, Denver knows reality cannot intrude. Thus, her imagination "produc[ed] its own hunger and its own food...she felt ripe and clear, and salvation was as easy as a wish (29). Serving first as a playhouse, then as a refuge from "hurt," the room changes in accordance with Denver's desires, becoming "[q]uiet, primate and completely secret" in her adolescence, a place she consecrates with perfume rather than veronica and where, in the realm of imagination, she discovers the pleasures of masturbation (18). "[T]he place became the point" (28). During one of her forays to her bower, a sudden squall catches Denver unawares, foreshadowing Beloved's arrival and Denver's abandonment of this space and of her imaginative powers. Beloved provides everything the bower does: "a racing heart, dreaminess, society, danger, beauty" (76). But without the sanctuary of her bower, Denver has no space where her imagination is free -- no space that protects. Enslavement to Beloved is inevitable.

Giving herself over to Beloved eventually results in such a loss of autonomy that Denver's earlier fears of the "thing outside the yard" escalate to the point where leaving the yard to seek help from the community is like "step[ping] off the edge of the world...[like] "be[ing] swallowed up in the world beyond the edge of the porch" (207, 243). Denver's fear of the outdoors is similar to Claudia's and Frieda's in that, in all three cases, marginality causes agoraphobia. Generally perceived as a "female" neurotic symptom, agoraphobia manifests itself as a more general fear of race for Claudia and Frieda and as fear of having

no space in which to live for Denver, whose fear is specific and concentrated:

> Out there where small things scratched and sometimes touched. Where words could be spoken that would close your ears. Where, if you were alone, feeling could overtake you and stick to you like a shadow. Out there where there were places in which things so bad had happened that when you were near them it would happen again. Like Sweet home where time didn't pass and where, like her mother said, bad was waiting for her as well. How would she know these places? What was more...out there were whitepeople and how could you tell about them? Sethe said the mouth and sometimes the hands. Grandma Baby said there was no defense -- they could prowl at will, change from one mind to another, and even when they thought they were behaving, it was a far cry from what real humans did. (243-44)

Baby Suggs tells Denver that there is no defense, to "[k]now it, and go on out the yard. Go on" (244). Denver's heart pounds, her throat burns, her scalp perspires. Hearing male voices, she tenses, wondering if she is walking in white men's "space," if she will have to speak to them, if they will attack her, if the woman in a near-by yard will rescue her. The voices turn out to be those of a group of black men, and Denver's "easy encounter" with them raises her confidence (245). Her journey to Lady Jones's house meets with success; the community comes together to provide food and eventually gathers outside 124 to exorcise Beloved. Denver's new-found courage and self-confidence free her conceptual bonds, and as her world broadens, the attitude she assumes toward the way she conducts her life reflects the relationship between the space she inhabits and her behavior. When Paul D meets Denver on the street, she

is working for the Bodwins, is applying for work at the shirt factory, and is plucky enough to tell him to choose his words carefully when talking to her mother. In restructuring her environment, Denver makes space for healthy interaction with others, perhaps most particularly with the young man who eagerly calls out her name as she and Paul D part.

For Paul D, the past has been so soul-destroying that he walks for eighteen years in an effort to annihilate it. After the Civil War, he meets all manner of wandering, silent Afro-Americans on backroads, cowpaths, and secondary routes, travelling singly or banded together for support, all of them searching for family or running from "dead crops, dead kin, life threats, and took-over land....chased by debt and filthy 'talking sheets'" (52). Driven by a common sorrow, Paul D feels a kinship with

> Negroes so stunned, or hungry, or tired or bereft it was a wonder they recalled or said anything. Who, like him, had hidden in caves and fought owls for food; who, like him, slept in trees in the day and walked by night; who, like him, had buried themselves in slop and jumped in wells to avoid regulators, raiders, paterollers, veterans, hill men, posses and merrymakers. Once he met a Negro about fourteen years old who lived by himself in the woods and said he couldn't remember living anywhere else. He saw a witless coloredwoman jailed and hanged for stealing ducks she believed were her own babies. Move. Walk. Run. Hide. Steal and move on. (66)

Paul D's only respite in those eighteen years is his encounter with a weaver woman in Wilmington, Delaware, who beds him down in cotton sheets, a luxury that keeps him in her bed for the better part of two years. With Sethe, to whom he has been heading for the last seven years, Paul D

feels as if "he had been plucked from the face of a cliff and put down on sure ground" (131). Finally prepared to incorporate the past into the present in anticipation of the future, Paul D acknowledges that "it wasn't the place I was heading toward; it was you. We can make a life, girl. A life" (46). Having found a soul-mate like Sethe, who "never mentioned [his neck jewelry,]...[who] left him his manhood," Paul D believes that he and Sethe can heal their still-seeping wounds in the space they create together (273).

During the eighteen years in which Paul D is a traveling man, Sethe remains stationary, spiritually immobilized; for her, "the future is a matter of keeping the past at bay" (42). Sethe had claimed ownership of her freed self in the twenty-eight days at 124 prior to schoolteacher's arrival, a time frame commensurate with her menstrual cycle and symbolic of her natural and intimate connection with childbearing and the life of the family. Within the space of those twenty-eight days, Sethe has

> [d]ays of healing, ease and real talk. Days of company; knowing the names of forty, fifty other Negroes, their views, habits; where they had been and what done; of feeling their fun and sorrow along with her own, which made it better. One taught her the alphabet; another a stitch. All taught her how it felt to wake up at dawn and <u>decide</u> what to do with the day. (95)

Sethe's words suggest repose, tranquility, and cheer within space that Bachelard says "condenses and defends intimacy" (48). After schoolteacher comes into her yard, however, Sethe's "mind [is] homeless"; she does not "go inside" until Paul D's arrival forces "rememory" (204, 46). Paul D's broken promise to catch her when she falls and Beloved's disappearance leave her once again fixed in the present, capable only of

humming lullabies and staring out the window with "[n]o plans at all" (272). In the final pages of the novel, Paul D puts the past and the future together when he tells Sethe, "'[M]e and you, we got more yesterday than anybody. We need some kind of tomorrow....You your best thing, Sethe. You are.' His holding fingers are holding her" (273). Sethe, in disbelief, responds, "'Me? Me?'" (273). The poignancy of these words lie in Sethe's recognition of the possibility of a soulful future with Paul D, one in which he will, indeed, hold her ankles to "[m]ake sure [she] get[s] back out" from the spaces in her mind too terrible to enter alone (46). The possibility of soul space is at least imaginable at the end of Beloved; its characters move toward the discovery that the dimensions of soul space are the dimensions of freedom.

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